

Garden Line - June 2011

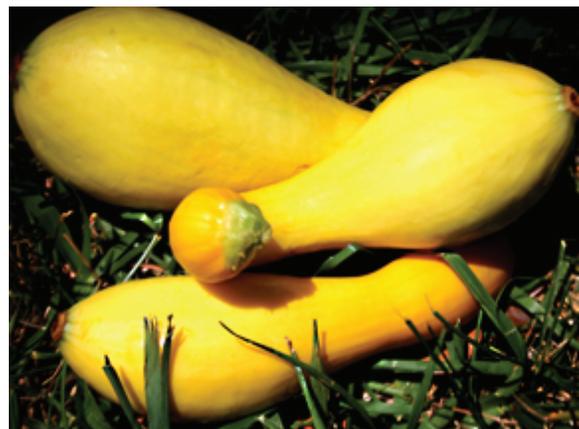
by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

As I write this, we are just about to get our first significant rain since February, and boy, do we ever need it! It has been a dry spring and one can only hope that regular rainfall will return to make our lives, and that of our plants, a little easier.



Now that June is here, temperatures are bound to creep up, so we all need to remain vigilant to the watering needs of our plants. Continue to keep your plants well-mulched and give your lawn, flowers, and shrubs approximately 1 inch of water per week to keep them healthy. Trees need a bit more water and often the best way to water an established tree is simply to lay the hose under it and let it trickle out slowly, moving it occasionally. Be careful to water out near the drip line (the extent to which the limbs reach) rather than near the trunk. For a new tree, give it about 5 gallons of water each week until it is well established.

Many of you should be getting a lot of fresh vegetables from your garden this month. Peppers, eggplant, squash, zucchini, peas and many other plants should be producing well right now; in fact, tomatoes will likely be winding down later this month. If you find yourself with an abundance of vegetables, share with your friends and neighbors (which is actually a great way to meet them), donate to a local food pantry, or can or freeze for yourself to enjoy later. There is plenty of good info on the web about canning. Texas Gardener has an article in their current May/June issue on canning, as well.



Fruits that one can expect to harvest this month (or pick up at your local farmer's market) include peaches, figs, blueberries, and blackberries. I always loved the taste of a fresh peach and they are easy to freeze for eating later. I like them in cobblers and use them to make homemade peach ice cream. Blackberries and blueberries are great in cobblers, as well.



Being from further north, I'd never had fresh figs until I moved to Houston. My only problem with them is that I can't seem to get enough of them! I grow the 'Celeste' fig at home. With fruit about the size of quarter, they aren't the biggest fruit available, but, in my opinion, it is one of the best figs that I have eaten. There are many great fig cultivars suited to Houston, so do a little research and find one that suits you.

A quick word about pests: if the hot, dry weather keeps up and you have St. Augustine grass, you're sure to see an outbreak of chinch bugs if you don't keep your lawn well-watered. Actually, you may not see them, as they are very small (about 1/8-1/6 long) but you'll likely see the damage they cause. Chinch bug damage looks like dried up grass and is caused when they suck the juices out of the grass. If you get down close to the ground you may be able to spot the little black bugs running around. They have mostly clear wings with a little black spot on each wing. Prevention is best, so, first and foremost, keep your lawn healthy and well-watered as chinch bugs love hot, dry weather. Second, if the infestation is severe, you may have no choice but to treat them. There are numerous synthetic chemicals you can treat them with. There are also organic approaches, such as using diatomaceous earth, or mixing up a solution of insecticidal soap and spraying through a hose end feeder.



Try to stay cool this month as the warm weather is only just beginning. See you next month!