

Let's Talk Gardening

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August Gardening Miscellaneous

At the Gardenville class last Saturday, it wasn't so much about organic gardening as it was about container gardening. Some really interesting stuff was presented by Juanita Vale who is at the Gardenville store in San Marcos (I think.) I learned that, if you want to keep a plant in a particular pot, you need to trim the tops and roots periodically so that the plant doesn't outgrow the pot. Also found out that bromeliads and orchids do well in containers. You don't actually put any soil in a pot for orchids. You just put a few rocks and maybe a stick of drift wood and lay the orchid on the wood—maybe stuck in a piece of sphagnum moss. They get all they need from the air. A little mist every morning can't hurt, though.

If you have quite a few containers that you maintain year after year, it's a good idea in the spring to scrape off the top layer of the crud that builds up over the year and add some compost in each pot...not much, just a half inch or so. As you do this each spring, you could add just a little slow-release fertilizer on top of the roots—just a little. Organic fertilizer would probably be best (bat guano—remember?).

Then we each made a terrarium out of a glass jug, some gravel, potting soil and some small plants that Juanita brought just for the occasion. She says that you don't need to do anything to them for the first 2-3 months; just watch 'em grow. Of course, they eventually will get too big for the jug. Then you gotta take them out, trim them back and start over; but it's gonna be fun watching it, I think.

C'mon out to the class. The next one's gonna be an introduction to organic products with a guy named Nick Duffy. It's only \$10 and you get a \$10 gift certificate when it's over. Cool.

If you want some early flower-color next spring, it's time to order your bulbs. A good rule of thumb is to plant the bulbs at a depth of 2-3 times the largest measurement of the bulb; i.e., if the bulb is 1-1/2 inches tall, plant it 3-4 inches deep (pointy side up.) Daffodils seem to be the favorite bulb—especially the yellow or golden trumpet-shaped daffodil. Not many of them will come back year after year, but the Fortune variety is one that will. Others you might try are Carlton, Ice Follies (white), Mount Hood (white) or most any of the jouquillas. Tulips, on the other hand, are to be considered an annual here. It's just too warm in the winter here for the bulbs to get their "winterizing." If you buy tulip bulbs, put them in a paper bag and place them in the veggie tray in the frig for about 60 days or so. I used to buy mine in the latter part of October and plant them about December 27 but you can plant them up until about the middle of January. They sure are "purty", but I figure that the deer would eat them out here, so I haven't even tried.

Remember to plant your bluebonnet seeds in this month. Remember also that the seeds must make contact with the well-drained soil or they won't germinate. They must germinate in late summer or early fall, develop a root system and be ready to shoot up when it gets warm next spring. In the winter, the new plant is called a rosette because it is only about 3-4 inches in diameter and is close to the ground and not much to look at.

If you see a great, big ol' wasp digging holes in the ground, don't be alarmed. It normally won't hurt you. It's a cicada killer wasp building her nest. The female kills a cicada and drags it into the hole to feed her babies. Sounds terrible, but it's a good way to get rid of the cicadas.

You shouldn't need to water the lawn right now. These little rains the past few weeks have filled up the soil so that you can just go turn the sprinkler system off right now. Go on. Do it! Because I said so, that's why.

Starting in about mid-August you can plant broccoli plants, Brussels sprouts, cabbage plants, Chinese cabbage, carrots, cauliflower plants, Swiss chard, collards, kale, English peas, Irish potatoes, and summer squash. If you have any peppers left over from spring, they will probably produce again if you can keep them alive until the temperature stays below 90 during the day. Water them as needed and give them about a half cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer per plant to pep them up.

Hibiscus, if they get at least a half-day of sunshine, will bloom profusely in the fall. They do, however, require regular watering, especially in the afternoon heat. Add both a time-release fertilizer (such as Osmocote or Slo-cote or one of the organic ones) and a water-soluble fertilizer (such as 20-20-20 or Miracle Gro) from April through October. The time release should be applied about every 6 to 8 weeks as a top dressing and the water-soluble once a week. This process feeds the plants constantly; i.e., the time-release feeds the roots all the time as long as the soil is moist and the water-soluble is a good pick-me-up.

Send your comments and/or questions to gardener@gvtc.com.