

## Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

### Catch-up Time

If you need to do some things in the garden that you've been putting off because it's just plain ol' hard work and it's usually too hot outside to go do them, NOW is the time—while it's cool. For example, if you happen to have a few bushes that you've been meaning to move just over there, this is a good time because they're probably dormant nor or at least as dormant as bushes go. You can dig the hole, dig up the bush, amend the soil, move and transplant all without breaking a sweat. Can't be doing THAT two months from now, Bubba. Since the ground in South Texas never really freezes, it's also a good time to plant trees and let them get their root system established before the hot weather sets in about May or so.

This is also an excellent time to do that pruning you've been putting off; especially if the trees have dropped their leaves. You can see the limbs that are rubbing, see the dead wood, thin out the crowded limbs, and generally thin out the canopy to let more light in. This last one is especially important for fruit trees. Peaches, for example, need annual pruning to (1) remove the suckers that sprouted up with all the moisture last year and (2) maintain the bowl-shape to allow sunshine to get to the inside of the tree and all the fruit located there.

Remember though to never trim more than 2/3 of the canopy of any tree; i.e., 2/3 canopy, 1/3 trunk. If these are small trees, be sure to protect the trunk from deer rubbing their horns on them next fall. Personally I use a piece of fence wire four feet tall and about 3 feet long rolled into a sleeve and placed around the young tree. I usually put two or three pins about 18 inches long (made out of clothesline wire) around the base to help hold the fence in place and keep it from rubbing on the soft bark of an immature tree. So far it seems to be working. Remember to paint any oak-tree cuts you make.

One of our readers in the Fredericksburg area commented the other day that maybe I should be writing more about what he called "rock gardening;" that is gardening on the top of a hill where the "soil" is mostly rocks—large, small and all sizes in between. I've written about it before, but I guess it was before his time, and I think it bears repeating because I suspect it applies to a lotta folks around here. About the only way you're gonna be successful with gardening of any kind in this situation is by building raised beds. It doesn't have to be all that high—maybe 6-10 inches—but it has to be up off the rocks enough that the sun won't cook your plants from below as well as above. You can use almost anything to make the sides of the raised beds out of—some of that rock that you live on, landscape timbers, railroad ties, "two-by" boards and so on. It doesn't have to be fancy, just has to hold the soil in place. When you go to fill the bed, be sure to use a light weight soil; one that has lots of compost in it—at least 50 percent. If you buy it and have it hauled in, ask for "light garden mix." Don't use topsoil, it's too heavy unless you mix it with lotsa compost and some washed sand.

The reader also mentioned that he has a slow well and that he therefore doesn't wanna be using much of his precious water for plants. I can understand that—makes perfect sense to me. That's why I recommend using drip irrigation. It only puts water where it's needed, doesn't get the leaves wet, and only uses the minimum amount of water necessary.

He also mentioned that he's got a Big Tooth Maple that is doing just fine up there. Glad to hear that. It's one of the prettiest trees you can have in our area. It's just like the maples up north; turns all colors in the fall before it drops it leaves. Beautiful! That's what they have at Lost Maples in case you wondered.

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to [gardener@gvtc.com](mailto:gardener@gvtc.com)