

## Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

### Gotta Save Water

While I was out for my daily walk this morning, I saw evidence of something that really kinda bothers me; i.e., water on the street, driveways, and sidewalks from an automatic sprinkler system that the owner obviously hasn't checked lately. I wanted to tell the owner so badly that no matter how much he waters that driveway, sidewalk and street, it ain't gonna grow, so FIX IT, awready. It's not the money, it's the water. I don't want to run out because you water the street.

Then right across the street was a man doing it right--watering his new crape myrtles with a hose. Only problem with a hose is that it's too easy to stop short and not put quite enough water down. To do it right, the hose should be laid on the ground at the base of the bush or tree and allowed to trickle for about 20-30 minutes. That way, it seeps into the ground and goes deep; and that's what you and the tree/bush wants. Deep watering makes the roots go deeper which allows the plant to survive these long, hot spells much better.

There, I feel better now. That's sermon number 84, I think.

I was just reading an article by Mark Peterson of the Texas Forest Service about tree-planting in this area. He, along with a whole bunch of other gardening experts, has come up with a list of recommended trees for this area. Mark says recommended shade trees for this area include, but are not limited to chinquapin oak, Texas red oak, cedar elm and Mexican live oak. Ornamental trees include Mexican redbud, Texas mountain laurel, desert willow, anacacho orchid tree, and possum-haw holly. He also says that the best time to plant trees is between November first and April first. Couldn't have said it better myself.

Shade trees are something that most of us just take for granted—if we have them. For those of us who have had them previously and don't have them now, we really miss 'em. I even miss raking leaves ('course I'm more than a little weird sometimes.) Some of us cuss trees because we can't get the grass to grow under them. Duh! Quit planting grass there! Get some plants that DO grow in the shade. There are lots of them. One of the prettiest that can't stand ANY sun is firespike. It's in bloom right now around town. Bright red flowers on stalks about 10-12 inches tall.

Be sure to continue feeding your patio and containerized plants during this period. Use either Hasta Gro or Peters 20-20-20. Keep the soil moist, but not sopping wet.

If your roses haven't started blooming yet, there's still time to prune them lightly and fertilize them with rose food. Don't use too much food, though. Just follow the directions on the bag.

You can divide perennials like daylily and iris now. Dig them up. Split up the bulbs or rhizomes (large underground roots). Give half of them to your neighbors and friends. Add some compost and fertilizer to the bed. Replant them at the same depth they were. Mulch the daylilies, but not the irises.

Picking flowers encourages the plants to put on more flowers. Really! Yes, it does. I don't lie.

If your tomatoes are setting fruit as they should be by now, it's time to fertilize them a little. When the tomatoes get about the size of your thumb, put about 2-3 tablespoons of 19-5-9 slow release fertilizer on them; if you use organic fertilizer, use about twice as much. Water it in really good.

On the other hand, if you didn't get the tomato plants with the "hot names" your plants are probably starting to get tall and lanky and may not have any tomatoes at all yet. If that's the case, prune about a foot or so off the tops of the stems. That will encourage them to branch more and shade themselves and not get so tall you can't reach the tops any more. If/When the weather cools down a little, they will probably set fruit. Depending on when the first freeze occurs this winter, you may or may not get ripe fruit. Remember, when they start turning from green to white, you can go ahead and pick them and place them on the kitchen counter to get red.

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