

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

Hope the Freeze Didn't Getcha

...because it sure did me--lost all the tomatoes and green beans! Thank goodness I'd moved the tropicals into the green house and watered them...looks like they're all okay. Phew. That was a close one. Some of those tropicals are 12-15 years old and I sure would hate to lose them now.

This freeze will probably put the St. Augustine grass to sleep now until next spring. I hope you got your fertilizer down. I didn't, but may do it later on if we get some rain soon. In the meantime, you can turn the sprinkler system off and start cutting the water bill down some. You only need to water the grass about once every 2-3 weeks in the winter, maybe just once a month if we get any rain at all.

If winter weeds were a problem in your yard last year, you might want to apply a winter-weed pre-emergent herbicide. It's a little late, but it might work yet. What it does is keeps the weed seeds from germinating in the first place. Remember, though, that it only kills winter weeds. You need to do it again in the spring with the proper herbicide for spring and summer weeds.

Lynn Rawe was the County Extension agent for horticulture in Bexar County a couple of years ago. Her article in the San Antonio Express News at that time was excellent in the coverage of bulbs. I was gonna write about bulbs this week, but think I'll just paraphrase what Lynn wrote because she did all the research and I couldn't do any better.

She wrote about the different types of bulbs that do well in our part of Texas; daffodils, lilies, tuberose, and crinums. If you're gonna be buying daffodils, look for these varieties (some may not be available now); Grand Primo, creamy white and yellow blooms, Golden Dawn, fragrant yellow bloom with orange center, Early Cheer, clusters of 15-20 flowers of white blossoms with yellow centers.

If lilies are your heart's desire, you probably oughta get some oxblood lilies which produce clusters of small, deep red flowers from August through September. Hymenocallis, also called Spider Lilly, is another old favorite with white strap-like flowers with dark green leaves.

Tuberose, or Mexican Firecracker, has a fragrant red-orange flower.

Crinum is an old favorite which can hang tough in our summers. Some of the more popular varieties include: Elizabeth Traub, hot pink with wine tint, Bradley, hot pink, Ellen Bosenquet, ruffled leaves and hot pink to purplish flower with white threads, Maiden's Blush with pale pink, fragrant, long lasting flowers and 20 or more blooms when mature, Summer Nocturne, 24 inches tall and blooms from July until the first frost, purplish-pink flowers that fade to white.

When you go to buy your bulbs, look for the largest and most firm bulbs in the bin. Ask if the bulbs need to be stored in the frig for any period of time. If they do, put them in a paper bag (not plastic) and store them in the crisper drawer in the frig. Don't put any fruit in the drawer with the bulbs because the ripening fruit produces a gas that will ruin the bulb.

This first freeze was a couple of week early, and I know it's hard to do, but now is the time to take out all the old summer flowering plants that have done such a good job for you. In some cases due to the rain and cooler weather, they might have rebounded a little with a fall blush of blooms, but, let's face it, they're finished. It is, after all, fall now and they need to be taken out to make room for the pansies and other fall color plants to give them a better chance at survival. Leaving the summer stuff in may gain you a few more blooms, but it'll cost you in the beauty of the fall and winter bloomers.

You can still plant spinach if you can find the transplants. Coho is probably the best variety for our area. Its leaves grow from the center so that you can cut the outer leaves many times throughout the winter and early spring.

If you collect seeds from your favorite plants, be sure to let them dry out really well before you pick 'em. Store them in the frig and they'll keep for a couple of years.

In the next couple of weeks, you're gonna see a little series of two articles I put together on caliche-- what it is, what it isn't, and how to learn to love it. Kinda interesting, I think. I've wondered about caliche for a long time now and finally got some answers.

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to gardener@gvtc.com.