

Janet B. Carson
Extension Horticulture Specialist
Arkansas Gardener
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It was a glorious spring and an extremely mild winter, now let's hope our summer is as kind. By now, everything should be fully leafed out and growing. If you have plants that are not growing to their potential, assess their location and consider replacing them. With large shrubs and trees, a gradual decline is often an indication of serious problems that may not be correctable. Trees do not die overnight. It is usually a slow death, so take inventory of your plants. When replacing plants in the landscape, be aware you don't have to replace them with the exact plant you had. Diversity is a good thing in a landscape, it adds interest and seasonal differences. Think about the season you need color in and something that blooms in that season.

Any spring blooming plants that need pruning, and have not been pruned, need it done before mid-month. While they don't set flower buds until late summer or early fall, you need to allow the plant recovery time after pruning. Often our July and August can be somewhat challenging for plant growth, so prune by mid-June to have nice flowering plants next spring. One application of fertilizer per year is all that is needed on trees and shrubs, so fertilize (if you haven't already done so) and water as needed. This is also the time period to be on the lookout for insect problems that attack every year. Bagworms are in their crawling stages on junipers and cedars, and lacebugs have begun to get established on azaleas, if you didn't take precautionary measures. Spray as needed. It is much better to catch these problems early, versus waiting until late summer when there is nothing you can do.

Edible gardening continues to gain in popularity every year. Whether you garden at home on a patio or in raised beds, or you participate in a community garden, there is much to do in the vegetable garden now. Tomatoes are the number one vegetable grown by home gardeners, and we typically start harvesting this month. This is also the month we begin to see blossom end rot. This black rotted area on the base of the tomato is not a disease but a calcium deficiency. We often see it when we have dry periods followed by a heavy rain. Major fluctuations in moisture are often the cause—so try to keep the garden mulched and evenly watered to avoid the problem. Tomato fruit worms and hornworms are also out and can devour tomatoes quite quickly. Larger worms should be picked and destroyed. Smaller ones can be controlled organically with BT or Dipel (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). As temperatures begin to heat up remember the tomatoes do not set fruit well when daytime temperatures exceed 95 or if night-time temperatures stay above 75. If you haven't planted any vegetables or herbs yet, there is still time to plant. This is the ideal time to plant winter squash and pumpkins in particular. These long-season plants take up room in the

garden, but give great results in the fall. Southern peas and okra love the heat as well and do nicely all summer.

Our mild winter and early spring had people chomping at the bit to plant summer color, and many planted too early and now have to replant. There are many options of plants to choose for annual color. Don't forget about the Arkansas Diamond plants. This year's choices are Penta Graffiti Red, Velvet Elvis Plectranthus and Sriracha Pink Cuphea. These plants can take as much heat as you can give them and bloom until frost. Annual plants are the plants we fertilize the most. Fertilize lightly but often and don't forget to water. I typically use a complete fertilizer throughout the season.

Perennial plants are those that come back for at least two seasons. Right now, many are in full bloom, including purple coneflower, daylilies, gaillardia, hardy hibiscus and lilies. Deadheading long season bloomers, encourages more flowers and less seed production. Deadheading simply means to cut off the flowers as they fade so that they don't set seeds. When a plant sets seeds, it puts energy into seed production and not into producing more blooms. Fertilize hosta plants at least two or three times in the growing season, and keep them watered. They are not drought tolerant. Watch for slugs. If slugs are a problem, consider mulching your plants with sweetgum balls. This spiny mulch works well at deterring slugs and cats from the garden. You can also use beer traps to lure them away. Last year was our worst slug year ever, let's hope we don't see as many this season.

As we head into the hot, humid months of summer, look at adding color to your patio or garden with tropical plants. Whether you intersperse your houseplants outside or you buy blooming tropicals, these plants thrive in our summer months. Hibiscus plants come in a wide range of sizes and colors and can be grown in containers or in the ground. Mandevilla comes in both a bushy and a vining plant form and range in colors from light pink to deep red. Bougainvillea does best when its root system is confined and comes in a range of colors, and ixora comes in orange or yellow. Try something new. To keep them blooming their best, water regularly and fertilize at least every two to three weeks.