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May zone report 2016

We lucked out on our winter weather, now let's hope the summer growing season is as kind. We have had a glorious spring, and there are little signs of winter damage. By now, many of our spring blooming plants have finished blooming. If they need any pruning, now is the time to do so. After bloom is also a great time to fertilize all the trees and shrubs in your garden. Have a reason to prune. Plan what you want the plants to look like when you are finished pruning. Do you want perfect round "meatballs" or a more natural look? What height do you want them to be when they finish growing this season? If you prune to the expected height, you aren't leaving any room for growth, so compensate. The sooner after flowering you prune the better. This gives the plant time to recover before hot weather hits, and hopefully they will set more blooms for next spring. Fertilize after pruning. Typically one application of fertilizer per year on trees and shrubs is all that is needed.

Our winter annuals played out a bit earlier than normal in many gardens, and it is high time to plant their summer replacements if you haven't done so already. Heat lovers can go in, including lantana, ornamental sweet potato vine, zinnias and caladiums. Try some new varieties. Consider using plants from the Arkansas Diamond program. These plants with a blue diamond logo are grown in Arkansas by local growers and are tough performers statewide. The new choices for 2016 are Velvet Elvis Plectranthus, Red Graffiti Penta, and Cuphea Srirachi Pink. Last year's plants are still great choices and include: Yellow Lantana, Purple Angelonia, Dragonwing Begonia, Purple Scaevola (Fan Flower), Cora Cascade Periwinkle and Redhead Coleus. Remember, annuals are just in the ground for one season, so fertilize them often to keep them growing and blooming. Mulch is also important to help with weed control and moisture management. New plants arrive daily and the gardeners challenge is finding room to plant them all.

May is a great month to plant vegetables. We are harvesting cool season crops, but all of the warm season vegetables can still be planted, from snap beans and corn, to tomatoes, peppers, squash and eggplants. By May, our soil is warming up and we can begin to plant okra, southern peas and even watermelons and cantaloupes. As temperatures heat up, so do pest problems. Monitor for insects and diseases and catch them early. If you planted an early season garden, you should be harvesting now as well.

In addition to annuals, summer tropicals are everywhere. Everyone knows hibiscus, but we now have mandevilla in red, pink or white—with compact plants as well as the larger vining ones. Bougainvillea needs to be pot-bound for best flower production, and comes in a wide range of colors. Tibouchina or glory flower has deep purple blooms, and there are several varieties of clereodendron with pink, white or even blue flowers. Duranta is another all

summer bloomer in white or purple, and will come back in central Arkansas and further south. Tropicals thrive in heat and humidity and are an easy addition for color in the garden.

All of our lawn grasses are now fully green. If you haven't fertilized yet, now is the time to do so. For many of our lawns one application of fertilizer could suffice for the year, and now is the important time to do it. Bermuda grass lawns can be fertilized more often, but frequent fertilization means frequent mowing. Monitor for the summer weeds, because they are growing now as well.

Perennials are looking great right now. Peonies are blooming beautifully, along with baptisia, amsonia and foxglove. Taller flowering perennials often need a little extra support from perennial stakes to help hold their blooms upright, especially in heavy rains. Know which of your plants need fertilizer and which don't. Most spring bloomers will benefit from an application of fertilizer after bloom. Hosta plants need fertilization two or three times a season.

Many spring blooming bulbs bloomed early this year and they can be cut back now. All spring bulbs need at least six weeks of foliage growth following flowering, but you don't have to wait for the foliage to die back naturally. Begin planting summer bulbs that like the heat, including caladiums, elephant ears and gladiolus.

May is usually the time we begin to see more insect problems. Lacebugs begin feeding on azaleas and bagworms begin to feast on junipers and other plants in the landscape. Last year we had quite a few reports of bagworm activity—that insect that constructs a sack from the plant it is feeding on. The sack protects the crawling larvae from predators and insecticides, so the key is to catch them as they begin. If you had a bad case of them last season, you might consider a preventative spray starting mid May and once a week until mid June. An organic approach is to spray with BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).