Zone Report June 2015

The winter that never wanted to end, finally did, but we had a late spring. It turned out prettier than we expected, but many of our spring blooming plants were a month or more behind schedule. Many gardeners were worried that they had dead plants, since they were so delayed in starting growing, but by now, everything should be fully leafed out. If you have plants that are not growing to their potential, assess their location and consider replacing them. Many of us have lost the old fashioned garden hydrangea flower buds again this winter, which means no blooms this summer. The plants are doing fine and putting on plenty of foliage, but I am pulling mine and planting something else—I want a reliable bloomer. When replacing plants in the landscape, you don’t have to replace them with the exact plant you had. Consider something new and different, you may find a new favorite. I really like the new varieties of Hydrangea paniculata and Hydrangea arborescens—the panicle and smooth hydrangeas. They will tolerated a bit more light, don’t wilt daily in hot weather, and bloom on the new growth, so winter damage is not an issue. We can’t get the deep pinks and blues, but there are lovely white and some pink flowering forms. Investigate your options.

If you still have spring blooming plants that need pruning, get it done as soon as possible. Mid June is the drop dead date to prune to allow the plants time to recover to set flowers for next spring. Often our July and August can be somewhat challenging for plant growth, so prune and fertilize once (if you haven’t already done so) and water as needed.

Pansies and violas are still hanging on in some gardens, but it is time to pull them and plant heat lovers. Try some of the new Arkansas Diamond plant choices—these are locally grown annuals selected by a team from the Arkansas Green Industry and Extension and include purple Angelonia, red dragonwing begonia, Cora cascade periwinkle, gold yellow lantana, blue scaevola and redhead coleus. Check out the Arkansas Diamond facebook page for more information. https://www.facebook.com/pages/Arkansas-Diamonds-Plants/1576214462616548
As with all annuals, they do best when given ample water and fertilizer.
Perennials that are blooming now include purple coneflower, coreopsis, daylilies and Shasta daisies. To keep them blooming, dead-heading or cutting off the spent flowers will prevent seed set and return them to blooming much more quickly. A little dose of fertilizer and water as needed and you can get blooms for months on these plants. The national garden bureau has named 2015 the year of the gaillardia or blanket flower. It is another long blooming perennial that thrives in hot, dry areas. The original gaillardia is a combination of yellow, red and orange, but you can now find solid yellow, burgundy and orange varieties. Compact and standard sizes are also available, but each flower sets a seed head, so deadheading is needed for better flowering.

Vegetable gardens are in full swing. We got a very late start on spring planting, so we still have a lot of cool season vegetables in the garden. Some of them are bolting or setting seeds, so it is time to harvest and replant with summer lovers. Make sure you use all the space you have to grow in. When you harvest one thing, plant another. There is still plenty of time to plant tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and okra. Now is a great time to plant southern peas and pumpkins, gourds and winter squash. Make sure all plants in the garden are mulched—this reduces weeds, prevents soil from splashing onto the stems and fruit, and moderates soil temperature and moisture levels. Water is still the most vital ingredient for success, but do pay attention to fertilizer needs and monitor for diseases and insects. Our plants aren’t the only thing growing; insects and diseases are here too, so monitor and control as needed.

If your garden needs a heat loving flowering plant, look no further than tropical’s. Tropical blooming plants are hitting their stride now. The hotter and more humid it gets, the better they like it. Consider using them in the ground as summer annuals or in containers. Flowering hibiscus, mandevilla, bougainvillea, tibouchina, and ixora can add a lot of color. Fertilize them regularly for constant blooms. The more sunlight they receive, the better they bloom.

The crape myrtle felt scale was a new insect problem for us last season, and we have already seen more across central and southern Arkansas. This small white scale can build up to large numbers quite quickly. Sometimes your first indication is a black sooty mold growing on the stems. Look closely. If you see tiny white specks along the bark, the scale is probably the issue. Systemic insecticides are your best method of control. To learn more about this pest problem here is a link to our fact sheet: http://www.uaex.edu/publications/PDF/fsa-7086.pdf Don’t ignore this pest, as it can spread to other crape myrtles in your yard. Long term scale damage can eventually weaken and kill plants, so take action.