

MAY GARDEN TASKS

LAWN CARE

- The best defense against weeds is a healthy lawn. Learn how to care for your lawn throughout the year. Visit <https://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/grasses/> and click on your grass variety to learn more about your lawn. Keep it happy, healthy, and weed free.
- Don't fertilize cool-season turfgrass (fescue, bluegrass). It has been growing actively all winter, and it will begin to go dormant as summer heats up. Let it slow down naturally, and it will be better able to withstand the heat and drought of summer. Call for a Lawn Maintenance Calendar for your type of turf. It tells you how to care for your lawn month by month – such things as fertilization, mowing and watering.
- Most of the weeds you see now are winter annuals. The time to control these was last August. In a couple of weeks, the weather will be too hot for these winter annuals, and they will start dying. Don't waste your time and money to spray them with herbicide. The best thing to do is mow them before they produce and spread seed. Put it on your calendar to spray for them in August.
- Warm-season grasses such as Bermuda, Zoysia or Centipede can be planted now. Mow cool-season grasses, such as Fescues, at a height of 3- 3 1/2 inches to help them survive hot, dry periods.
- Sharpen mower blades! A sharp blade cuts. A dull blade tears, making grass susceptible to diseases.

TREES, SHRUBS, and ORNAMENTALS

- Pinch your plants. Use your index finger and thumbnail to break out the lead growth at tips of branches. Pinched plants have shorter, sturdier stems, more lateral branching and more blooms. Pinch back mums, zinnia, salvia, cockscomb (celosia), petunias, marigolds, snapdragons, and garden phlox.
- It's time to plant summer beauties such as gladiolus, dahlias, caladiums, cannas and all those colorful bedding plants.
- Dead or diseased limbs on woody ornamentals should be apparent by now. Prune them out.
- Stake floppy plants, such as peonies, dahlias, and Boltonia (Michaelmas daisy), while they're small so they'll have support when they need it. After plants have grown large, they are difficult to stake.
- Cut roses properly. Removing too much wood and foliage when cutting flowers can seriously weaken your rosebushes, especially during the first year. Leave 2-3 well developed leaves (groups of five leaflets, not three) between the cut and the main stem.

- Grow great bearded iris by giving them excellent drainage, fertile soil, sunshine, and beds free of competing weeds and grass. Divide frequently (in August) for larger and finer blooms.
- Prune spring-flowering shrubs after they bloom. The best time to prune azalea, rhododendron, forsythia, spirea, flowering quince, kerria, pieris, and weigela is just as flowers begin to fade. Don't wait till summer, or you'll cut off next year's flower buds. To keep your shrubs ever young, prune one-third of the oldest canes back to the ground each year.
- Prune wisteria frequently throughout the summer to control vegetative growth and get better blooms next spring.
- Keep dogwoods healthy. Spot anthracnose and powdery mildew are two major disease problems that show up on dogwood trees in late spring and summer. To help dogwoods overcome diseases keep them watered, maintain soil fertility, and clean up fallen leaves to minimize the spread of the disease.
- MULCH! Prepare for dry summer weather and control weeds at the same time by using a layer of mulch 2-3" thick.
- Banish bermudagrass (wiregrass) from your planting beds. Keep it pulled to prevent it from overrunning your garden.
- Plant seeds of annual vines such as moonflower, scarlet runner beans or passionflower. Mix plants with the same growing requirements in your container gardens. Do not mix sun-loving and shade-loving plants together in the same container.

VEGETABLES AND FRUITS

- Plant veggies now that the soil is warm and the danger of frost is past. Sow seeds of beans, squash, cucumbers, and corn. Set out transplants of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and okra. Pinching also works well for many vegetable plants, including tomatoes and peppers. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/16-vegetable-gardening>
- Beat the squash vine borer, act now before they invade your squash plants. <https://surry.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/07/squash-your-squash-problems/>
<https://stanly.ces.ncsu.edu/2016/06/beat-the-squash-vine-borer-2/>
- Watch for slugs. These soft, slimy, slender pests have a special taste for tender young crops. Holes in leaves or on the leaf margins and a silvery slime trail in the morning indicate a slug feast the previous night. Slugs hide under boards, stones or debris during the day.
- Train and support tomatoes, pole beans, peppers and eggplants. Side dress sweet corn when it is knee-high.
- Make consecutive plantings of beans over a few weeks to extend your harvest.
- Blackberries – If you previously had galled cane damage from the red necked cane borer, Mark your calendar to spray bifenthrin in May at petal fall and again 10 to 14 days later. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/rednecked-cane-borer>

LANDSCAPE IDEAS

- Plant vegetables in your flowerbeds! Eggplant, pepper varieties, and cherry tomatoes make colorful additions to the garden. Bush beans and climbing beans have attractive foliage and charming small flowers. Vegetables can also mingle with flowers in pots on a patio or deck.
- Welcome back hummingbirds! Females will be in the area first; the males will follow soon. Salvias, honeysuckles, penstemons, and other tube-shaped flowers, especially red ones, will attract hummingbirds to your garden. Fill feeders with a solution of 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. Wash feeders and replace the food at least twice a week.