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July 17, 2011

**NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:**

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Summer Gardening Chores

Summer has been very challenging for even the dedicated gardener. Dealing with the extreme heat and dry weather is tough on us and our landscapes.

July and August in East Texas is often characterized by extensive dry periods which call for garden watering. Moisture, essential for plant health and production, can be conserved by applying a summer mulch, free of weeds, and one which will remain loose and well aerated. Chopped straw, coastal hay, pine needles, bark, and oak leaf mulches are excellent for conserving moisture, keeping the soil cool and weed crops limited. Mulches should be free of all possible weed seed.

Evaluate the volume of water delivered from lawn sprinklers to ensure healthy, stress-free grass during the heat of the summer. One thorough watering which will deliver one inch of water at a time is better than several more shallow sessions. The amount of water available through flower bed sprinklers may be checked by placing several shallow pans among shrubs or flowers.

Caladiums require plenty of water at this time of year if they are to remain lush and active until fall. Fertilize with 21-0-0 at the rate of one-third to one-half pound per 100 square feet of bed area, and water thoroughly.

Prune out dead or diseased wood from trees and shrubs. Hold off on major pruning from now until midwinter. Severe pruning at this time will only stimulate tender new growth prior to frost.

Provide a good watering for your valuable landscape trees. A soaker hose at the drip line of the tree will help the trees during the severe drought.

Sow seeds of snapdragons, dianthus, pansies, calendulas, and other cool-season flowers in flats, or in well-prepared areas of the garden, for planting outside during mid-to-late fall.

Plant bluebonnet and other spring wildflowers. They must germinate in late summer or early fall, develop good root systems, and be ready to grow in spring when the weather warms. Plant seed in well-prepared soil, one-half inch deep, and water thoroughly. Picking flowers frequently encourages most annuals and perennials to flower even more abundantly.

Make your selections and place orders for spring-flowering bulbs now so that they will arrive in time for planting in October and November.

Don't allow plants with green fruit or berries to suffer from lack of moisture.

A late-summer pruning of rosebushes can be beneficial. Prune out dead canes and any weak, brushy growth. Cut back tall, vigorous bushes to about 30 inches. After pruning, apply fertilizer, and water thoroughly. If a preventive disease-control program has been maintained, your rose bushes should be ready to provide an excellent crop of flowers this fall.

It is not too late to set out another planting of many warm-season annuals, such as marigolds, zinnias, and periwinkles. They will require extra attention for the first few weeks, but should provide you with color during late September, October, and November.

Watch for Chinch bug infestations of your lawn, especially in St. Augustine grass. These pests always show up in the hot summer time. Treat with an approved insecticide.

Establish a new compost pile to accommodate the fall leaf accumulation. Don't send the valuable leaves to the landfill.

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