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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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JULY GARDENING CHORES

July comes bearing gifts of summer bouquets and fresh garden vegetables. The productive landscape, too, will call for early summer care and important and timely gardening chores.

July in Texas is often characterized by extensive dry periods which call for garden watering. Moisture, essential for plant health and production, may 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.

Keep the soil areas around plants loose and cultivated to allow good water penetration and aeration. Following extensive rains and repeated waterings, soils often become compacted. Lightly cultivate soils to prevent compaction, being careful not to damage shallow root systems. Work in organic material to keep the soil loose and open and to put air back into the soil.

Do not forget to water thirsty Hydrangeas, Coleus, Caladiums, Impatiens and Mums during dry periods. Even in shade, the warm breezes of summer quickly dry gardening soils and plants. Shallow-rooted plants such as Azalea, Camellias, Dogwood and others tend to dry out quickly. Add a good mulch and water shallow-rooted plants often during hot, dry weather.

Even though a favorite summer sport, it is often damaging to lightly and casually sprinkle plants. Light sprinklings induce shallow roots which in

turn dry out all the more quickly. A slow, thorough soaking will insure moisture to a greater soil depth, deeper, healthier roots and, of course, watering less often.

Summer is not too late to plant colorful annuals and perennials, particularly if you are willing to purchase small plants rather than seed and to water well until the plants are well established. Plant hardy summer annuals such as Vinca, Salvia, Zinnia, Marigold, and Portulaca. Flowering annuals and perennials will increase their production and beauty as summer gives way to fall.

To keep flowering plants on the grow, remove the faded blooms often, which will induce more branching and more bloom. Seasonal flowering plants will profit, too, from an occasional feeding with a light application of a balanced fertilizer. Never allow raw fertilizers to burn the foliage and bloom areas.

Houseplants and container plants will enjoy July days out of doors. Bury the pots in a cool, shaded garden bed to prevent them from drying out so quickly. Water pots, container plants and hanging baskets often. Daily watering may be required for clay pots because they are porous and dry out more quickly than does plastic or wood containers.

Spray the plant foliage with a fine mist often, as houseplants like humidity. Never expose the tender plants to hot sun.

Summer is a time to think of spring. Consider digging and dividing overly crowded spring bulbs. Once the bulbs have taken full advantage of its foliage and the foliage has browned, it is time to spade them up for a thinning. Crowded bulbs produce fewer and smaller blooms and usually need thinning every three to four years. Begin to select and order spring bulbs for a fall planting.

July gardening days may include: fertilizing strawberry plantings, once they have completed their current crop; selecting Daylily varieties as they reach their peak of bloom; making cuttings from your favorite shrub or tree; controlling those persistent and hungry summer insects; feeding the rose garden; designing and constructing structural landscape features such as garden pools, walks and patios...and sitting back in your favorite lawn chair to enjoy the rewards of a long summer evening.

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