

What To Do in August

We are still in our least productive season for planting landscape plants here in Central Texas. It is still a good idea to let the landscape rest, and make the best of the heat while you plan for the fall gardening season. The exception is the vegetable garden, where it is your last chance to plant certain veggie seeds and plants.

Plant vegetable seeds. Beans, corn, cucumber, garlic, potatoes, shallot, summer squash

EARLY AUGUST: Okra, black-eyed peas, New Zealand and Malabar spinach, winter squash

Plant vegetable seeds in pots or flats. Keep these "cool." Give them bright sun, but perhaps some shade from the hottest afternoon sun, or an "awning" made of 30% shade cloth. Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, chard, Chinese cabbage, fennel, kale

EARLY AUGUST: Rutabaga

LATE AUGUST: Collards, endive, head and leaf lettuce, mustard

Plant vegetable plants. Okra, New Zealand or Malabar spinach, summer or winter squash

Plant herb plants. Mexican mint marigold, mints, oregano, rosemary, sage, wormwood (artemesia)

Plant annual flower/ornamental plants. Blue daze, celosias (cockscomb or plume), zinnia

Plant perennial plants. Ornamental grasses, sedum

Water deeply. Concentrate on trees, newly planted and established ones. Anytime we go for four to six weeks without at least an inch of rain, established trees need water. Trees less than two years in the ground need water every one to two weeks, depending on the soil, weather, and species of tree. Place a bubbler, a small sprinkler, or a soaker hose at the dripline of the tree (the area on the ground - a circle - corresponding to the furthest reaches of the branches above), and water for 30 - 60 minutes or more with a low flow of water.

You will need to adjust your watering schedule depending on your soil and weather conditions. Rocky, Hill Country soil will dry out much faster than clayey Blackland Prairie soil. Your finger is your best moisture meter: dig down as deeply as you can to feel the soil around the roots before watering. If you find that water runs off of the soil easily, and doesn't percolate well, use Medina Soil Activator, or Lady Bug Terra Tonic (which contains Soil Activator). These products help the soil to become more permeable, among other benefits. And don't forget the shrubs - they need attention, too.

Conserve water. Any time you water, use only sprinklers that spray the least amount of water into the air, where it is lost to evaporation. Water early in the morning or late in the evening for the same reason. In addition, the more water on the leaves, the greater the chances of fungal problems on the leaves. Even plain water on the leaves while the sun is out can also burn the leaves.

Consider investing in soaker hoses and/or a drip system. These watering systems put the water right where it's needed - in the soil and next to the plant - rather than wasting the water into the air. Of course, this saves on the water bill, too, and again - reduces the chances of diseases on the plants. While soaker hoses are easier to install in the garden or landscape, a well-designed drip system can last much longer. Ask us at The Natural Gardener for help with soaker hoses or a drip irrigation system.

Mulch, mulch, mulch! If you haven't done so already, be sure all bare soil is covered with mulch, or compost with mulch on top. Avoid putting mulch or compost onto plant stems. Use about three inches total wherever possible.

Continue spraying all plants with seaweed regularly. Seaweed, with all its trace elements and hormones, can do more to help plants survive the heat than anything else, besides water and mulch. Spray on and under the leaves, early morning or late evening.

Release Trichogramma wasps to reduce or prevent fall webworms in pecan trees. Trichogramma wasps are tiny predators which eat the webworm egg before it becomes a pest. (The wasp does not control the worms that have already formed webs. For these critters, spray Bacillus thuringensis (B.t.) on the leaves weekly). The fall webworm is often a problem in pecan trees starting around June in Central Texas, and having three to four generations a year. To prevent the webworm year-round, try releasing Trichogrammas in late April or early May, mid-June, and in early August. Because the population of webworms in August is often the most damaging, you may want to release three rounds of the wasps, two weeks apart, starting in early August.

(Thanks to Howard Garrett's Texas Organic Gardening Book, the Travis County Master Gardener Association's Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity, and the staff of The Natural Gardener for some of this month's tips.)