

FLORAL CITY GARDEN CLUB SUMMER HORTICULTURE HINTS

Summer heat and rains make for different gardening trials than the drier spring months. But don't give up, just work in the cooler times of day, stay hydrated and avoid the midday sun and afternoon thunderstorms.

Lawns are green and growing like mad this time of year. Remember to mow often and don't scalp the grass which makes it susceptible to disease. Turn off your automatic irrigation system if we have more than an inch of rain in a week or until the grass starts to wilt. The vegetables, flower beds and potted plants might need supplemental water if we have several dry hot days in a row.

Of course crepe myrtles are the stars of summer. Trimming soon after the first flush of blossoms can encourage re-blooming. Roses become prone to black spot (mold) during the summer; so be sure to remove all impacted foliage from the bed as soon as possible. Reliable summer bloomers in my butterfly garden include porterweed, penta, salvia, black-eyed Susan, firebush, milkweed, fire spike, and passion vine. Other sun-loving flowers for the summer include: Lily of the Nile, bush daisy, hibiscus, day lilies, canna lilies plumbago, periwinkle, sunflowers, cosmos, marigolds, bulbine, and coreopsis. Caladiums brighten the shady spots.

The summer vegetable garden has no leafy greens, but does have tomatoes that set before the night-time temperatures climbed into the mid 70s. Splitting skins are a problem soon after we get heavy rains. Green bush beans thrived until mid June from a single spring planting. Some of the peppers are going fine through the heat. My zucchini and cucumbers succumbed to worms. This year the eggplant started reliable production in June. Okra plants are producing; be sure to check often, because it only takes a day or two to go from edible to woody. During the "dog days" of July and August is a good time to cover your garden soil with plastic to kill pests and weed seeds so that the early September planting of fall vegetables starts out right.

It's not too late to trim trees with old weak limbs or palms with dead fronds that might come down in a thunderstorm or tropical system, especially if they are near the house or other structure.