

**Friday's Feature****By****Theresa Friday**

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**May in the Garden**

April gave us some surprise cold snaps. The month of May will give us warmer weather. Temperatures will climb and stay in the 80's. May is also our second driest month of the year. So with warmer and drier weather anticipated, gardeners will need to be sure to water when necessary and to keep an eye out for insect pests.

Many of the cool-season annuals such as pansies and snapdragons should now be past their prime. These can be replaced with many colorful summer annuals including celosia, coleus, crossandra, gaillardia, impatiens, kalanchoe, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental peppers, pentas, portulaca, salvia, torenia, verbena, vinca and zinnia.

Once planted, remember to fertilize these blooming plants on a regular basis with a slow-release fertilizer. It will also be important to deadhead when needed.

Deadheading, or the prompt removal of old flowers, encourages repeat blooming and prevents the plant's energy from being expended due to seed production.

It's also time to finish pruning your spring-flowering shrubs such as azaleas, camellias and spireas. Pruning now encourages lateral branching and produces a fuller look. But because spring-flowering trees and shrubs usually bloom on the previous season's growth, pruning later in the season will reduce the number of flowers that they produce next spring. Remember, always cut back to a bud or a branch that is pointed in the direction of the desired new growth. In general, branches that are to be retained may be cut back by one-third.

It's also time to start watching for pests on our ornamental plants. Keep an eye out for spider mites on Japanese hollies, lacebugs on azaleas and pyracantha, scales on camellias and hollies and whiteflies on ligustrum and gardenias.

One of the easiest ways of detecting these insects is to watch for sooty mold on leaves. Sooty mold is a type of mildew that grows on the "honeydew" excreted by sucking insects such as whiteflies, aphids and scales. Because ants also feed on this honeydew

excrement, their presence on plants often indicates an insect infestation.

Another way to detect small insects such as thrips or mites is to place a sheet of white paper beneath the leaves and sharply strike or shake the foliage. The insects or mites will fall onto the paper and can be more easily seen.

Some pests may need immediate control, especially if present in great numbers, but others may not be worth the time, effort, or cost of control. Don't apply a control measure until a pest population is present and damage is beginning to occur. If you must spray, use the least toxic remedy possible such as an insecticidal soap or horticultural oil.

Watering is going to be the key to a healthy lawn this month. Many people consider turfgrasses to be large water consumers, but many turf species have excellent drought tolerance mechanisms.

Water established lawns only when needed. The best time to water is in the early morning hours. Watering during the day wastes water due to excessive evaporation and can scald the lawn when temperatures are high. Watering in late afternoon or late morning may be detrimental if it extends the time the lawn is naturally wet from dew. This extended "dew period" can accelerate disease occurrence.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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