

April Monthly Reminder

Introduction

Spring wildflowers abound this month in the desert and possibly in your garden as well as the days warm. Pollinators, critters and pests will all be out enjoying the bounty, making this a busy month for gardeners - so keep an eye out and take environmentally friendly action as needed to maintain your alive and active landscape. Plant your garden with the things you enjoy most; the options are endless.

Maintenance

- Remove any remaining winter damaged plant parts and compost them unless diseased. Flower stalks on fading spring bulbs are not trimmed - allow them to die back naturally but when fully spent, trim at the base.
- Thin fruit of deciduous trees such as apple, peach, plum and apricot. Pick marble-sized (or smaller) fruit off so that the fruit are spaced about 6 inches apart (Refer to Training and Pruning Newly Planted Deciduous Fruit Trees AZ 1668).
- Protect young plants from wildlife. The best way to keep critters out is to use fencing 2' to 3' high. Stake the fencing to keep it standing up. Cage individual plants or entire plantings. For rabbits, use ½" poultry wire. For ground squirrels or chipmunks, use fencing with smaller openings; ¼" woven wire and cap the top as squirrels and chipmunks can climb. Leave fencing in place until plants become mature & less appealing to them (Refer to Fencing for Wildlife AZ 1481h).
- If your plants have yellowing or discolored leaves, contact the Master Gardener Plant Clinic for expert diagnosis and guidance on how to resolve the issue (see the reference link below for online form).
- Check your irrigation systems for leaks, clogged emitters and other issues. Regular maintenance includes flushing the lines on an annual basis (Refer to Drip Irrigation: The Basics AZ 1392 and the irrigation maintenance checklist from the City of Tucson/Tucson Water in the references).
- Monitor tender new growth on roses and other plants and check the undersides of leaves for aphids, thrips, and spider mites. Instead of chemical controls, use a blast of water to dislodge pests or add 1 tablespoon of liquid dish detergent to 1 gallon of water and spray the top and bottom of leaves (Refer to Aphids AZ 1635, Diagnosing Problems of Roses in the Landscape AZ 1528, and Spider Mites, Backyard Gardener).
- Flush accumulated salts from root zones of drip-irrigated plants in containers/raised beds by watering once 3X as long as normal.
- Plan or install active or passive Water Harvesting systems before monsoon (Refer to Landscape Management Practices to Optimize Passive Rainwater Harvesting and Plant Health AZ 1916 and Harvesting Rainwater for Landscape Use AZ 1344).
- Mulch to a depth of 3-4 inches around trees and shrubs. Be sure the mulch is a few inches away from the trunk; don't make a "mulch volcano" as you can harm the plant (Refer to Selecting, Planting, and Staking Trees AZ 1402).

Planting

- Plant warm season annuals for summer flowering-aster, coneflower, gaillardia, lisianthus, marigold, pentas, portulaca, Madagascar periwinkle, and zinnia (Refer to Flower Planting Guide for the Low Desert AZ 1100).
- Plant perennials that provide color and attract pollinators such as chamomile, Gooding's verbena, justicia, lantana, Russian sage, and salvias.
- Plant summer bulbs such as dahlias, iris, and caladium.
- Sow seeds outdoors for cucumbers (English and Armenian), melons, okra, squash, and yard-long beans (Refer to Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden AZ 1435).
- Transplant seedlings of eggplant, squash, peppers, tomatoes, and thyme into the soil (Refer to Growing Tomatoes, AZ 2078).
- Plant heat-loving vines such as Baja passion vine, pink trumpet vine, yellow orchid vine, and crossvine (Refer to Landscape Vines for Southern Arizona AZ 1606).
- Plant fig trees (Refer to Growing Common Figs in the Low Desert AZ 1636).
- Plant citrus trees to give them time to get fully established before cold weather.
- It's the perfect time to plant heat-loving herbs such as Basil, Oregano, Rosemary, Sage, Thyme and more (Refer to Growing Herbs in Tucson AZ 2061).

- Plant cacti and agaves as well as native and non-native desert-adapted plants to allow roots to establish before the heat begins. Consider the mature size and sun demands and any other limitations for location (Refer to How to Propagate Agaves and Cacti from Cuttings and Seed, AZ 1483 and Saguaro Horticulture: Selecting and Planting Saguaro, AZ 1932).

Fertilizing

- Fertilize established (not newly planted) citrus (2nd of 3 annual feedings) if you did not do so in March. For oranges, tangerines, and grapefruit, the first application was 1/3 of the total in January or February, the current 1/3 in March or April, and the last 1/3 is in May or June (Refer to Citrus Fertilization Chart AZ 1671).
- Fertilize Bermudagrass once a month (Refer to A Turfgrass Maintenance Guide for Residential and Commercial Lawns in the Low Elevation Arizona Desert AZ 1817).
- Begin mild fertilizing of vegetable gardens.
- Fertilize your roses on a 3 to 4 week schedule.

Watering

- As the weather warms, increase your watering frequency but adjust if your garden receives significant rainfall (Refer to Watering Trees and Shrubs: Simple Techniques for Efficient Landscape Watering AZ 1298 and Irrigating Citrus AZ 1151).
- Consider a free “water efficiency audit” (For City of Tucson residents, refer to their “Zanjero” program below).

For more information on this month's topics, the Cooperative Extension offers the following resources, along with a wide range of bulletins and additional documents.

- AZ 1481h Fencing for Wildlife. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1481h.pdf>
- Pima County Master Gardener website. Plant clinic. Link: <https://arizonace.quickbase.com/db/bpud95r3m?a=nwr&dfid=13&ifv=250>
- City of Tucson/Tucson Water Irrigation Maintenance Checklist. Link: https://www.tucsonaz.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/water/documents/landscape-resources/tw_irrigation-system-maintenance-checklist.pdf
- AZ 1392 Drip Irrigation: The Basics. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/drip-irrigation-basics>
- AZ 1635-2014 Aphids. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/aphids>
- Spider Mites. Backyard Gardener #195. Link to PDF: <https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/attachment/SpiderMites.pdf>
- AZ 1668-2015 Training and Pruning Newly Planted Deciduous Fruit Trees. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/training-and-pruning-newly-planted-deciduous-fruit-trees>
- AZ 1139-2015 Pruning Deciduous Shade Trees. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/pruning-deciduous-shade-trees>
- AZ 1402 Selecting, Planting, and Staking Trees. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/selecting-planting-and-staking-trees-powerpoint>
- AZ 1435 Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/ten-steps-successful-vegetable-garden>
- AZ 2078 Growing Tomatoes. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/growing-tomatoes>
- AZ 1606 Landscape Vines for Southern Arizona. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/landscape-vines-southern-arizona>
- AZ 1636 Growing Common Figs in the Low Desert. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/growing-figs-low-desert>
- AZ 2061-2023 Growing Herbs in Tucson. Link: https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az2061-2023-%2008-28-23_0.pdf
- AZ 1916 Landscape Management Practices to Optimize Passive Rainwater Harvesting and Plant Health. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/landscape-management-practices-optimize-passive-rainwater-harvesting-and-plant-health>
- AZ 1344 Harvesting Rainwater for Landscape Use. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/harvesting-rainwater-landscape-use>
- AZ 1100a Flower Planting Guide for the Low Desert. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/flower-planting-guide-low-desert>
- AZ 1483 How to Propagate Agaves and Cacti from Cuttings and Seed. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/how-propagate-agaves-and-cacti-cuttings-and-seed>
- AZ 1932 Saguaro Horticulture: Selecting and Planting Saguaro. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/saguaro-horticulture-selecting-and-planting-saguaro>
- AZ 1671 Citrus Fertilization Chart. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/citrus-fertilization-chart-arizona>
- AZ 1817-2020 A Turfgrass Maintenance Guide for Residential and Commercial Lawns in the Low Elevation Arizona Desert. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/turfgrass-maintenance-guide-residential-and-commercial-lawns-low-elevation-arizona>
- AZ 1298-2017 Watering Trees and Shrubs: Simple Techniques for Efficient Landscape Watering. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/watering-trees-and-shrubs-simple-techniques-efficient-landscape-watering>
- AZ 1151-2021 Irrigating Citrus. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/irrigating-citrus-trees>
- City of Tucson. Zanjero Program. Link: <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/Departments/Water/Conservation/Zanjero-Program-Free-Water-Efficiency-Audit>