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*R. Craig Mauney*

**R. Craig Mauney**  
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**Gardening in May**

**Lawn Care**

- Plant warm season grasses from mid-April to early June, such as Zoysia, Bermuda, Centipede and St. Augustine.
- Begin mowing cool-season grasses, such as fescue, at a height of 2.5 to 3 inches to help the roots survive the hot, dry periods ahead. Practice grasscycling by leaving the clippings on the lawn.
- Treat the summer broadleaf weeds with an herbicide before it gets too hot and the weeds get too good of a hold on the turf.
- Apply preemergence herbicides to control crabgrass, goosegrass, and foxtail.
- Check for white grubs and control if necessary.

**Edibles**

- Plant warm season vegetables such as melons, peppers, squash, beans and okra.
- Side dress (fertilize) vegetables 6 weeks after planting.
- Thin peaches and pears to 4 to 6 inches apart for large, high quality fruit.
- Apply cover sprays on fruit every 10 days to 2 weeks or according to insect population.
- Consider planting some vegetables in your flowerbeds. Eggplant, pepper, and cherry tomato varieties make colorful additions to the flower garden. Be sure not to leave left over tomatoes in the garden or you'll have a million next year. Bush beans and climbing beans have attractive foliage and nice looking small flowers. Vegetables can also be added to flower containers in pots on the deck or patio.

**Ornamental Plants, Flowers, and General**

- Prepare plants now for dry weather. By using a thin layer (2-3 inches) of mulch, dryness can be guarded against. Pine needles, shredded leaves, wood chips, or bark work well and conserve moisture for use by the plant.
- Pinch plants back to promote more flowers. Pinch back mums, zinnias, salvia (red sage), cockscomb (celosia), petunias, marigolds, and snapdragons to slow down top growth, encourage lateral branching and more blooms.
- Divide cannas. Clumps of cannas should be divided every three or four years to encourage flowering. Set divided root sections 5-6 inches deep, 15 inches apart.
- Hang up the Hummingbird feeders anytime!
- Give your houseplants a vacation. Potted plants grown indoors over winter can become a part of the garden setting now. All types of indoor plants, including your collection of foliage plants, may be placed in the shady garden border, mostly among shrubs. Let plants spend the summer outdoors to thrive in nature's rains and fresh air. Control insect pests as needed.
- When planting container gardens this month be sure to use plants with similar needs such as water, light and temperature.
- If Spring-blooming shrubs need to be pruned, do so after flowers fade and before July 1 to allow next years blooms to set. Fertilizer may also be applied at this time if

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needed.

- Clean up around rose bushes to remove any of last year's blooms, leaves and other litter from the ground. Begin spraying fungicide to prevent black spot.

### Organic Gardening

- Watch for slugs. These soft, slimy, slender pests have a special taste for tender young crops. Holes in leaves or on the leaf margins and a silvery slime trail in the morning indicate a slug fest the night before. Slugs hide under boards, stones or debris during the day. Use this against them by placing a board near where they visit at night. Turn the board over the next morning and destroy them before they can do more damage to crops.
- Do you have aphid problems? Spray infested stems, leaves, and buds with a very dilute soapy water solution (about 6 drops per 2 liters works). Wash the soap off with clean water to keep the heat from damaging the plant. This works on the heaviest infestation.
- When buying plants for your landscape, select well-adapted plant types for your soil, temperature range, and sun or shade exposure. Consider natives and use our state native website for help:



<http://www.ncsu.edu/goingnative/>

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## What is Vertical Gardening?

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Vertical gardening is nothing new to an experienced gardener but maybe using the term is new. It is nothing more than using trellises, nets, strings, cages, poles or some kind of framework to support growing plants. This type of technique is suited to a small garden space but is utilized with all sizes and shapes of gardens and flower beds. Vining or plants that spread out, such as tomatoes, melons, cucumber or pole beans are good examples of plants used in this style of planting. Some plants will need to be tied to the support but others will attach themselves. You can also plant some shade tolerant types of plants near the trellis to take advantage of the shade. Vertically grown plants are more exposed to the elements than are low growers



so they may dry out quicker and may need more frequent watering. Of course this can be an advantage to those plants susceptible to fungal diseases.



## Choosing the Right Hat for Gardening

For gardening, you will want to choose a hat that will allow you to work comfortably outside and be ready for whatever the weather decides to put in your path. Of course you can add your own style to any hat you decide to wear. Below are some tips to think about when choosing your special gardening hat:



1. Pick a hat that fits comfortably on your brow or is a little loose. If the band constricts it can and will cause a headache.
2. Choose material thick enough to deflect most of the sun. A woven straw hat is great unless the weave is too loose.

3. Try the hat on. Bend your head down and look down at the floor. The hat should not fall off or slide down over your eyes.

4. A multi-season hat is great and will keep the drizzling rain from your eyes.

In winter you can wear a bandana or even ear muffs to keep warm and still use your summer garden hat.

**Don't forget your sunscreen!**

## Design Tips for Your Vegetable Garden

No matter what your goals are there are some easy tips and design principles you can follow to create an attractive vegetable garden for the home landscape. Listed below are some of them:

1. When planning the vegetable garden, keep these concepts in mind: contrast, balance, pattern and repetition.
2. Consider plants that like climbing and mounding. Visualize in your mind how these shapes will look together as the plants grow.
3. Look for a variety of leaf shapes and sizes when you plant. Something crinkly will look good with



something ferny.

4. Colorful varieties of vegetables make a great display such as multiple colors of peppers, scarlet beans or purple cabbage.

5. Adding groups of similar plants throughout the garden ties the space together. This can even be done with flowers, for example, by planting marigolds throughout the garden to give that put-together feel.

6. More is better. One vegetable plant here and there is not as bold as a group of 5 or 7 of the same plant.

7. Consider height. Taller plants should be in the back of the bed unless you are using them to shade the hot afternoon sun from a cool season plant.

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# From the Master Gardener Hotline - Fig Trees

*Bertram Lantz, Master Gardener Volunteer*

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Fig trees can grow to 50 feet tall, but typically they are 10 to 30 feet tall. They should be planted in well drained soil with full sun and have a southerly exposure. Fig trees have shallow root systems and the base of young trees should be covered with mulch or straw, especially during the winter months. They are relatively disease and insect free, but often the roots can become heavily galled and stunned by root-knot nematodes. Nematodes are microscopic worms that live in the soil. Tests for nematodes can be conducted through the Soil Testing Laboratory at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. If a soil fumigant is required, it must be applied by a licensed applicator.



A recent call on the Master Gardener Hotline is as follows:

**Question** - My fig tree is 12 – 16 feet high. How much can I reduce the height and when should this be done?

**Answer** - The best time to prune a fig tree is from early March until April 15. This will insure that the fruit crop will not be affected by severe cold or a late frost.

A fig tree can be cut back to almost any height, so prune the tree back to the height you want. Fruit is produced on last years growth so there will probably be some reduction in the amount of crop during the current year.

As a general rule, fig trees do not require extensive pruning. In subsequent years, remove suckers and dead branches, avoid branches that cross each other and keep the tree open to allow light into the tree. If light pruning is done during the growing season, it should be done after the fruit has been harvested.

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