

May Gardening Tasks & Tips



There never seems to be enough hours in the day during the month of May, yet May is the time when daylight lingers into sweetly scented dusk. The lawn needs to be cut, the vegetables need to be planted, and the weeding never ends. May is perhaps the busiest month of all for gardeners in most gardening zones.

Here in zone 7 or 6b, depending on which map you look at, May is the time when vegetables and tender annuals can be set outdoors. Typically Mother's Day heralds the start of the outdoor gardening season for tender annuals and flowers. I plant tomatoes, peppers, and sweet potatoes after this date, always mindful of the weather. If a frost threatens, you'll want to cover all the tender plants with cloth (never plastic) or newspaper to protect them.

May is also the time to sow seeds outdoors. For me, that includes sunflowers, zinnias, Bachelor's buttons and many other beautiful, heirloom annual flowers that grace the gardens at Seven Oaks.

May Gardening Tips



- Purchase your vegetable garden plants now. Keep them outdoors until you're ready to plant them. Make sure you water them well.
- Add compost to the soil now before you plant your flowers and vegetables.
- If you need to start a compost pile, this is the perfect time! Stack bricks, empty pallets or build one from wood. It doesn't have to be large or elaborate, just big enough so that you can pile in leaves, grass clipping and plant scraps.
- Let your spring flower bulbs die back naturally. It's tempting to want to cut the foliage back, but the foliage needs time to help the bulb produce next year's flower. You can braid up the stalks of daffodils and narcissus, fold them over, and secure with a rubber band to neaten the garden, but leave tulips and others along until they die back naturally. Remove the foliage only after it turns brown.
- Plant seeds for tender annual flowers and vegetables outdoors now, after the last danger of frost is past. Make sure you keep them well-watered.
- Be careful when planting new flowers in areas where you have perennials from last year. Some do not emerge until the weather turns quite warm, and you may accidentally dig them up. It's a good idea to use plant markers to help you remember where you have planted flowers. You can make them yourself using rocks - paint the rock a bright color, then paint the name of the flower on it. Spray with a clear craft acrylic sealer and done - instant plant marker.

- Stake up your peonies now while they are emerging, before the flower heads develop. A peony hoop or a circular support keeps the heavy flowers from dragging down the plants. You can also hammer stakes into the ground in a triangle around the plant and use garden twine in a circle to keep the plant upright.
- Weed your garden now and clean up any leftover debris from the winter.
- Plant dahlia, gladiolus and other tender bulbs now.
- Mulch, mulch, mulch! Mulch is a gardener's best friend. It helps suppress weeds and retain moisture. Add mulch now after weeding.
- Check hoses and sprinklers now before placing your hoses outdoors. Consider investing in a drip system or a soaker hose, which adds water near the roots of plants without wetting the leaves.
- Have your mower serviced and change the blades now before grass cutting season begins in earnest. A sharp blade is healthier for your grass.
- If you need to transplant trees or shrubs, now is the time to do it. Once the hot weather sets in, it's better to wait until the fall to move plants in the garden.
- Move fountains and birdbaths back outside. Keep them clean by washing weekly with plain water and scrubbing them out.
- Despite many popular myths to the contrary, it's fine to continue feeding the birds in the warm months if you enjoy watching them. It won't make birds dependent on your feeder for food.
- Plant your window boxes and containers now. Make sure there is adequate drainage in containers to allow excess water to run off. Look for pictures to inspire new combinations of flowers and foliage in your container gardens.
- Plant sales, garden tours and lectures are popular in May. Take advantage of them! You may see new combinations or flowers that please you. Take your camera along on tours and if the location allows it, photograph your favorites so you can recreate them at home.

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