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**“Gardening Calendar May”**

May is a big harvest month in the vegetable garden. Onions, potatoes, summer squash, green beans, cucumbers and tomatoes will produce vegetables to harvest.

Recognize that onions are ready to be harvested when the tops flop over. Allow the bulbs to sit on the soil surface awhile to harden off before they are moved to their final storage situation. If you have space, store them in mesh bags in an air-conditioned room. An alternate option is to place them on a picnic table in the shade.

When potatoes begin to bloom, they signal that they can start to be harvested. Larger potatoes become available if you wait until the tops die. Once the tops die, don’t leave them in the ground if the soil is wet. Dig them up and use them. The best plan seems to be to start harvesting at bloom for new potatoes and then make the final harvest when the tops brown.

The trick with summer squash is to harvest it when the fruit is small. Production can be very high for a short period, so harvest it as you can use it. Squash vine borers are a problem and stop production when present. To control them, apply Thiodan or Sevin at the growing point each week. The application can be a powder or spray. Follow label’s instructions.

Green beans also need to be harvested in a young, tender state. If you get behind, remove all of the overly mature pods, so new beans will be produced.

Cucumbers have made a fast start this spring. They also are most desirable if harvested when they are young and crisp. Discard oversize, yellow cukes to encourage the plant to produce more blooms and fruit.

Some of the recommended varieties of tomatoes will be ready to harvest after mid-month. If you were lucky enough to obtain one of the few BHN 968, also known as Cherry Surprise, tomatoes, they start producing fruit in May. If you keep them irrigated and fertilized, they will produce through the summer. The larger tomatoes will produce in June and early July.

Often the first tomatoes that ripen are the blossom-end rot tomatoes. They have a black area on the fruit due to a calcium deficit, which is caused by fluctuation in calcium availability as temperatures fluctuate. The black area can be cut off, and the fruit can still be used. Blossom-end rot is usually not a long-range problem.

If stink bugs show up on the tomatoes, Sevin is the best solution. Again follow the label’s instructions. The best way to slow down spider mite infestations is to apply a preventative spray of seaweed extract under the tomato leaves each week. Use 2 tablespoons per gallon of water.

There is still time to plant eggplant and pepper transplants in the vegetable garden. Okra and southern peas can be planted by seed.

In the flower garden, replace the cool weather annuals with hot weather annuals. Zinnia and vinca lead the list for plants in the sun but cosmos, moss roses and purslane also work well. For the shade, use caladiums, coleus or pentas. Pentas, zinnias, vinca, moss rose and purslane all work well in containers. Pentas and zinnias are the best butterfly and hummingbird plants. To help the monarch butterfly population look for butterfly weed, Asclepius. It is the only plant the monarchs will lay their eggs.

It is time to fertilize the lawn. Use a slow-release lawn fertilizer, such as 19-5-9. Mow St. Augustine at 3.5 inches, Zoysia at 2 inches, Bermuda at 1.5 inches and Buffalo grass at 5 inches tall.

To assist your container-grown citrus trees, add soluble fertilizer, such as Peters, Miracle Gro or Schultz, in the watering can once or twice per week. They should be full of fruit and hungry for nutrients.