

Gardening Almanac for the Plateau

May

Weather Average Temperatures and Rainfall:

The average rainfall for the month of May on the Plateau is 5.38 inches, and the average maximum temperature is 74 degrees F., the average minimum temperature is 51 degrees F. Over the years, locals have planned on the last frost date as no later than May 15th.

Activities By this time, most lawns of cool season grasses will be well established and free of care except for regular mowing. If the grass is first year grass, it is advised to mow it longer in length than usual. This means more mowing time, but your efforts will pay off later. It is not too late to add lime to your lawn if needed.

After flowering shrubs have bloomed out, trim them back to desirable shapes and sizes. Hybrid rose bushes should be cleaned up by trimming out dead canes and overly long limbs. Scrub roses or antique and colonial roses should be left alone. If they have spread over too large an area, it is best to dig out the parts that are no longer wanted. Clean up under roses and add new, clean mulch.

As last year's perennials come up, re-evaluate your flowerbeds and plan new designs or settings. Begin transplanting or planting annuals. Look for zinnias, which are resistant to molds and love sunshine. They should be watered in the morning and deadheaded as needed to encourage more blossoms. Verbena and phlox will bloom profusely during this month. Cosmos, coral belles, petunias (especially the wave petunias), Shasta daisies, salvia, roses and many others will begin blooming. Day lilies will start their yearly show and continue most of the summer.

Perennials have a relatively short blooming time, so that's why we encourage the planting of annuals close by, and especially in mass plantings for large areas of color. We just can't emphasize deadheading enough for both perennials and annuals – a daily job, but well worth it. If you have mums growing, keep them cut close to the ground until midsummer. After that, they can start to grow sturdy, healthy stems and leaves. Make sure they are watered, but don't overwater. They need to be fed 2 or 3 times during the season with a low-nitrogen fertilizer, and could use a bit of mulch.

This is the perfect time to get tired houseplants out of doors into shaded areas for the summer. Easter cactus, if properly shaded, will bloom profusely, as well as numerous others. Ferns that have wintered over under the house or in the garage will need to be repotted with fresh soil and brought out into gentle shade.

Plant herbs in pots, those that you do not wish to put in garden plots. Many will tolerate direct sun, but keep them watered. They will grow quickly and be useful for table needs within a month.

It's time to start vegetable gardening in earnest. Get tomato plants started and check soil for good acidity, as that is the ingredient for the finest Plateau tomatoes. Also consider growing basil with your tomatoes to improve the health, flavor and yield of your tomatoes.

If mulch hasn't been put in your gardens yet, this would be a good time to do it.

Check your blue birdhouses and clean them out to prepare for the second "litter".

If you haven't already done so, this is a good time to check your gardening tools to make sure they're in good working order. Also, any pots you may want to use should be cleaned with soapy water, a little bleach and a stiff brush.

After your spring flowering bulbs have died, cut the stem to ground level, but leave the foliage intact so it can restore energy to the bulbs for next year's display. Don't tie the foliage together in any way because that would decrease the amount of photosynthesis that takes place. After the foliage has turned brown naturally, it can be removed.

A pre-emergent can be applied to areas of your lawn where you had a crabgrass problem last year. As the weed seeds emerge, the chemical disrupts the growth process and the tiny seedlings die. Many weed seeds are stimulated to germinate by soil temperatures, so timing is determined by several factors – weather being a very important one. The first application should be applied in early April and will last about 6 weeks and then followed by another application.

Expect more ticks, mosquitoes and chiggers this spring. Moist, humid vegetation promotes better survival of young ticks and chiggers. Remove any standing water in your yard to decrease the number of mosquitoes.

Wildlife Besides the normal deer, rabbits, squirrels and ground hogs, you may see many of these birds that have been sighted in the county during May:

Red-bellied woodpecker, Hairy woodpecker, Downy woodpecker, Pileated woodpecker, Muscovy duck, Canada goose, American goldfinch, Carolina wren, Tufted titmouse, White-breasted nuthatch, Mourning dove, Carolina chickadee, Eastern bluebird, Blue jay, American crow, Purple finch, Northern mockingbird, American robin, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) warbler, Great horned owl, Great blue heron, Scarlet tanager, Gray catbird, Tree swallow, Brown-headed cowbird, Rose-breasted grosbeak, Ruby-throated hummingbird, Indigo bunting, Brown thrasher, Wood thrush, Cardinal, Kingfisher, Dark-eyed junco, Song sparrow, Mallard duck, Flicker, Great crested flycatcher, Eastern kingbird, Chipping sparrow, American bald eagle, Baltimore oriole, Wood duck, Rufous-sided towhee, Wild turkey and Red-winged blackbird.

Flowers Among the flowers in bloom, you may see

Rhododendron, Azalea, Fringe tree, Maiden pinks, Candytuft, Iris, Blue phlox, Dianthus, Impatiens, Buttercups, May apple, Goats rue, violets, Verbena, Daisy fleabane, White daisy, Salvia, Roses, Cosmos, Geranium, Petunias, late Tulips, Day lilies, Shasta daisy, Coral belles, Sedum, Gay flower, Snapdragons, Astilbe and Gaillardia.

This information has been created by the Cumberland County Master Gardeners Association, Crossville TN