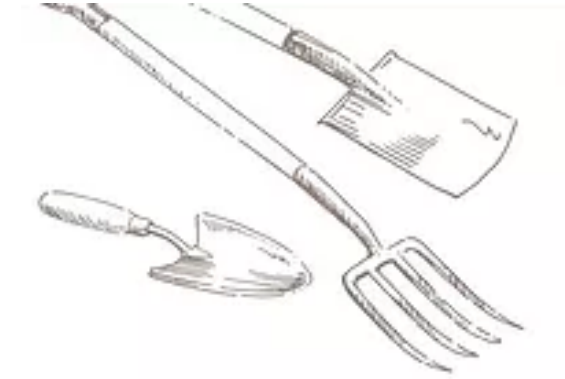


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May Gardening Tips



May usually brings prime planting conditions to Southern California gardens and landscapes. Temperatures are mild, the soil has warmed up, and we'll often have high overcast skies that will help new plants ease gradually into warmer weather conditions.

May is the best month to plant summer flowering shrubs and to start transplanting indoor plants to the outdoors. If temperatures are cooperating, this month will be your busiest until September with

planning, planting, and projects to head into summer. We could not find a more pleasant place or time of the year to be out working in the garden in our area than during the month of May!

May can also be a frantic month in our gardens, which we've already had a taste of with our recent rainfall. Besides, warm climates may change rapidly to hot climates. Colder (inland) gardens have suddenly appeared out of nowhere and demand immediate attention. You may not need a list of what to do in the garden because it is staring you in the face every time you walk into it. But here are some reminders of what you can do:

Check your **watering schedule**: If we have a normal May, we will receive little rain. This is a good time to take inventory of your garden. If you haven't already, ask yourself what areas could be switched over to low-water and drought-tolerant plants. Do you really need that lawn, or is it finally time to convert it into a gorgeous California native and drought tolerant garden? We can help you determine your water needs and make suggestions for your garden.

Add Mulch Now: With the warmer weather coming, this is a good time to add two to three inches of good organic mulch around the base of trees and shrubs. The mulch will cool the root zones, hold in moisture, and discourage weed growth.

A good rule of thumb for flower and vegetable gardens is to water deeply once a week, preferably in the late evening or early morning hours to allow for the greatest saturation into the soil and to avoid evaporation. Better yet, set your irrigation system to water during the night. Avoid overhead watering of vegetables as this induces mildew and wastes water.

Flowers: Deadhead spring blooming bulbs but let the foliage grow until it yellows. Divide crowded perennials and make sure tall perennials are staked. Deadhead and begin replacing pansies and primroses, and other cool season flowering plants as the blossoms fade. Replace cool season annuals with heat lovers such as marigold, cosmos, sunflower, tithonia, Nicotiana, verbena, zinnia to name a few. Feed blooming roses and mark bulb plantings that will need division.

Marigolds can add brilliant color to a border, garden, or container. Marigolds in bloom signal that summer is just around the corner. They require a sunny planting area and soil that drains well. Add lots of organic materials when preparing the soil. Marigolds need regular irrigation, water on a weekly basis. Give everything a good feeding to get things growing.

Vegetables: As you're planning your vegetable garden, consider planting times as well as plant compatibility. In most climates it's safe now to seed or plant heartier vegetables such as beans, peas, potatoes, lettuce, carrots, corn and chard. Sow cucumbers, squash, melons, peppers, tomatoes and other tender annuals. Plant celery and cucumbers near your bean starts - they make good neighbors! Beans also get along well with peas, corn, and potatoes, but keep them away from "aromatic" vegetables such as leeks, garlic, onions and shallots.

Carrots, tomatoes and lettuce also like each other's company - just be sure not to mix them with dill. Seeds of corn, pumpkins, squash, beans and melons can be sown directly into the ground now. If you sow vine crops for later transplant use peat pots. At planting time bury the whole pot so fragile roots don't become damaged.

Bulbs: As their blooms fade, remove flowers from tulips and daffodils and give them a dose of fertilizer but leave the leaves where they are as they're needed to produce next year's buds. From now until the beginning of July you can make chrysanthemums bushier and more productive if you pinch 1/2 inch off of each stem when they're 6 or 7 inches high. Bulbs planted now will still bloom through the summer, usually 6 weeks after growing begins.

Planting: Shop for new plants and replacements for plants that didn't make it through the winter. If you're transplanting seedlings introduce them gradually to their new environment to harden them off. Set them outdoors for longer and longer periods for a week or so before planting. This also goes for indoor plants you are transporting to outdoors. Choose sheltered shady areas at first and work up to sunnier, breezier spots.

You can buy and plant new trees and shrubs in May. Dig holes that are twice the circumference of the root ball. Finish planting new citrus trees and berry bushes for a late harvest. Prune flowering trees and shrubs as they finish blooming. Clean up any drooping or ragged fronds on palm trees.

Fertilizing: Start using a liquid fertilizer on recently planted annuals after they've had a chance to get established. Use rose fertilizer or an all-purpose garden fertilizer on roses, perennials and deciduous and annual trees and shrubs. In most climates new growth should now be popping up on roses. Beware of over-applying fertilizer,

which can be fatal- or at least cause leaf burn. After applying fertilizer, water thoroughly.

Weeding: May and leading up to are crucial months in the garden for weed control. In many areas weeds have already begun flowering and seeding in all that rich soil you've prepared so carefully. Nip weeds in the bud (haha) or get ready for some extra workouts this summer and years to come. If you use sprays to control weeds, be sure to choose a warm day without wind. Weed your garden thoroughly and then mulch around young plants to prevent further weed growth. If you wait any longer, weeds can easily take over your garden by mid-June. A well-mulched garden will reduce your major weeding efforts to two or three times during the growing season.

Pest control: Slugs abound...as do all those other persistent garden pests. Make it a last call for as many slugs as possible. Whatever your method to control these pests, today's slug war will reduce their numbers later in the season so the vegetables you sow will make it to table. An excellent slug and snail control product is **Sluggo** from Monterey Lawn and Garden Products. It is Iron Phosphate based and thus safe around pets and/or wildlife and can be applied to protect outdoor ornamentals, fruits, vegetables, berries, lawns - just about anywhere slugs & snails hang out.

Give aphids and other damaging pests a blast: hit them with a heavy dose of hose water or wipe aphids off plants then saturate problem areas with a spray of insecticidal soap. An excellent product for insect control solution is **Bayer Tree & Shrub Insect Control** (also now available in granular form with fertilizer added). It is a systemic (applied as a soil drench) and thus easy to use and provides 12-month protection. Although it cannot be used on any edibles (citrus, vegetables, etc.), it is fantastic on larger ornamental trees and shrubs.

May Summary Planting Guide:

Flowers From Seeds: Alyssum, Anchusa, Coleus, Cosmo, Gaillardia, Marigold, Mexican firebush, Moonflowers, Morning glory, Nasturtium, Nicotiana, Portulaca, Shasta daisy, Sunflower, Verbena, Vinca rosea, Zinnia

Flowers From Bedding Plants: Ageratum, Alyssum, Aster, Balsam, Begonia, Campanula, Candytuft, Carnation, Chrysanthemum, Coleus, Coral bells, Cosmos, Dianthus, Forget-me-not, Gaillardia, Geranium, Gloriosa daisy, Gazania, Impatiens, Lisianthus, Lobelia, Marigold, Petunia, Portulaca, Salvia, Vinca, Zinnia Vegetables: Beans (snap and lima), Cantaloupes (and other melons), Carrots, Chayote, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, New Zealand spinach, Okra, Peppers, Pumpkins, Squash (summer and winter), Tomatoes, Watermelon.