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MAY GARDEN CHECKLIST

In this week's article I want to mention things gardeners need to be considering for May. The following is a garden checklist:

- ✓ Harvest lettuce as it develops. If you have leaf lettuce, clip the leaves as you need them, the plants will develop new foliage. With butterhead and crisphead varieties, pull up the entire plant and remove the roots and outer leaves. Harvest frequently because once the weather warms most lettuce will "bolt" or go to seed. Bolted lettuce is bitter.
- ✓ Keep a clean garden. Mulch around plants with 3-4 inches of mulch to help maintain moisture and discourage weeds. Organic mulches also break down slowly, releasing nutrients into the soil. Mulch also cuts down on soil borne diseases such as tomato blight.
- ✓ As early vegetables bolt, go ahead and harvest what you have, cutting off the seed stalk will not encourage new growth. Broccoli heads may not be as large, but harvest while they are full and closed. Yellow blooms means the quality is going way down.
- ✓ Warm season vegetables – tomatoes, squash and corn can still be planted. As the weather warms, add southern peas, okra, peppers, eggplant and sweet potatoes. As you plant, broadcast a complete fertilizer in the soil, then repeat in about 6 weeks. Mulch and water as needed. Watch for insects and diseases and weeds.
- ✓ Prune spring flowering shrubs as soon as the flowers fade. If you prune in the fall or winter, you will remove next season's flower buds.
- ✓ After tulips fade, prune the old flower stalks, but leave the foliage intact until it has ripened and turned brown. The leaves are necessary to help the bulbs build strength to develop flowers for the following season.
- ✓ If you have black ants clinging on your peony blooms, don't use the bug spray. They are snacking on the sweet fluid produced by the buds as they open. Contrary to popular belief, ants are not necessary for the blooms to open. However, peonies do benefit from the ants' presence because, while they are feeding on the nectar, they ward off other insects that might want to eat the peony.
- ✓ Fertilize warm-season lawns – zoysia and bermuda – when they are totally greened up. Use a high nitrogen fertilizer. Most of the weeds that have

- been blooming are winter weeds and should be on their way out. Start watching for summer weeds such as crabgrass.
- ✓ All the shrubs should be showing signs of growth by now, even crape myrtle. Take inventory of any plants that were not doing well last fall and see how they are doing. Corrective pruning or replanting may have to be done.
 - ✓ Strawberry season should be here soon. Harvest berries when they are a deep red color – strawberries do not ripen after they are picked. Watch for slugs and fruit rots, especially after periods of rain.
 - ✓ Houseplants can safely be moved outside if you haven't already done so. Expose plants to sunlight gradually.
 - ✓ Pansies and violas will start to fade and should be replaced with summer annuals for summer color. There are lots of excellent annuals to choose from. Some to consider are the 2002 Arkansas Select-penta that likes the sun, attracts hummingbirds and butterflies and comes in pink, red, white and purple and the 2001 Arkansas Select- Dragonwing Begonia is another winner for partial shade.
 - ✓ Herb gardens are an easy way to have an ample supply of fresh herbs for cooking. Most nurseries carry herb plants. Many are perennials and some are evergreen and can be used in the landscape as well as to eat. Rosemary is a semi-shrub and thyme makes an attractive evergreen groundcover in full sun. Be careful with pesticides around herbs – remember you are going to eat them!
 - ✓ Don't forget about bulbs for summer foliage and flowers. Most nurseries have both dried bulbs and growing plants. Look for caladiums, elephant ears, cannas, gladiolas and dahlias. Most summer bulbs like warm soil before they really start to grow.
 - ✓ If you have grassy weeds growing in your groundcover, iris beds or flower beds, this is a good time to use one of the grass-specific herbicides. These products kill grass without hurting most flowers and groundcovers. Using them early will give a better kill and you won't have the dead grass to take away from the beauty of the flowers.

For more information on any of the above points, contact the Baxter County Cooperative Extension office at 425-2335.