

Home & Garden Resource Guide May 2008

May is considered the last month of our spring season. It starts out cool but ends up in the 80's and 90's. Where you could accidentally miss watering a pot and it still looked good, now it's wilted and dry...oops! That nice neat hedge is starting to grow out and could use a trim... where's the hedger? The Bermuda grass is light green and isn't growing as fast...didn't you just fertilize last month? Plants love May weather in Fresno (who wouldn't) and things are really starting to grow, so take a look around the yard and make adjustments...where's my note pad?

Watering

Plants and lawns will need an 'extra' drink as they tend to acclimate to warmer weather. You may need to increase watering times to compensate for evaporation but don't run it out into the street. Fresno has a water patrol. And get rid of that junky hose, buy a new one!

Fertilizing

Use slow release fertilizers (organics work best), they strengthen leaves and stems but do not cause rampant green growth like ammonium sulfate (the Twinkie food of plants). Light fertilizing on a more frequent basis is better as we head toward summer. Specialty fertilizers like Sol-PO-Mag have extra magnesium and potassium that can help lessen heat stress and sunburn damage on Japanese maples and dogwoods, apply it now!

Bugs 'n' Slugs

Bug season is here and will only get better (for the bugs). Systemic insecticides do a great job on aphids and scales especially for crepe myrtles and roses. For chewing insects and leaf miners try Spinosad a new organic, it can be used on fruits, vegetables, ornamentals and turf. Spinosad also comes in combination with Sluggo (Sluggo Plus) a pet safe slug and snail killer. Make sure you follow label instructions.

Cool Color

For color try this native from Africa, *Ruttya fruiticosa*, commonly called the African azalea. It's a fast growing evergreen shrub to 6ft. tall by 4ft. wide with dark shiny green leaves. Clusters of bright orange or yellow tubular flowers start in late spring and go through fall in Fresno, year round in milder winter climates. The flowers are also attractive to humming birds and nectar seeking insects. Plant it in any sunny location or large pot. Use lots of acidic mulch mixed into the soil and fertilize regularly for best blooms.

Pruners

I've owned a lot of hand pruners in my time from cheap off brands to \$75.00 Felcos. I've tried ergonomic pruners and always thought they were weird (and they are) but I finally found a pair that I like. They're made by Bahco and have withstood a hard 2 years of abuse. These hand pruners are comfortable, ergonomic and have a really sharp edge that lasts. Priced around \$27 dollars they are a great buy. One thing you need to learn about ergonomic hand pruners, if you use your other hand to hold a cluster of stems as a guide

when cutting, remember that the blade is in a different spot. My friend Joe keeps cutting the bottom of his hand and pinkie finger (slow learner!).

Vegetables

Get those veggies in the ground! It takes 60-70 days for tomatoes to ripen. Selections are still great and you don't have to worry about frost. Plant a basil garden or chives in a pot. A simple drip system on the patio is all you need to water an entire garden.

Know a Pro

The Old Pro

The first true nurseryman I ever met was Don, the owner of Henderson Experimental nursery here in Fresno. He was passionate about all aspects of plants from native culture to propagation and especially collecting unusual specimens. Tall and lean with brown-gray wind blown hair, his craggy face showed the years of working outdoors. He wore khaki pants, a work shirt and always had a cigarette in his mouth, the smoke causing him to squint when he looked at you. Ask a question about a plant (or any subject), he would stare at you through the smoke and decide if you were worthy of an answer. With some disdain, you would get a complete history of afore mentioned plant, its related species and how people didn't know crap about growing it, pruning it or fertilizing it. People went to Don not only for his knowledge but for his personality. He was a great nurseryman.

There are few, if any, colorful 'Old Timers' like Don left, but you can still find nursery people who love the business and work hard giving you the right information on all aspects of gardening.

New Pros

Ever walk into a nursery and wonder if the people working there know anything? Can they give you the correct information on a plant or disease problem? I've gone into a lot of nurseries and asked questions about plants and chemicals, sometimes I get the right answer, sometimes I get 'don't know' and sometimes I get bull----.

The best thing I can tell you to do is look at their name tag and see if it has CCN PRO on it. That stands for California Certified Nursery Professional. These are people who've taken the time to learn their trade and passed a series of exams given by the California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers. CAN-GC is made up of hundreds of independent nurseries throughout the state that promote the industry through trade shows, information sharing and education. The CCN exam started back in 1969 as a way to educate nursery people and set a standard for quality service. This test ain't easy (I know!). It takes 5-6 hours to complete the three part exam (general knowledge, plant identification and landscape design). To this day the passing rate is less than 50% and there are only around 4,000 certified nursery people state wide. If you pass the initial exam there are other advanced tests like Insects, Disease & Weeds or Turf Management to strive for. Now, I have many friends who are as good or as better than a CCN but how do you tell them apart from someone hired off the street? Look for the nurseries that hire experienced nursery professionals. Nurseries have been and will continue to be a place you can get honest knowledgeable service. And yea, I'm CCN #1553; Mr. Don Kleim was # 542.