

Transitioning to Summer

Mild temperatures and rhythmic rains of our Arizona growing season often bring more than flowers. The bumper crop of weeds that unwillingly follow are sure to bring the potential for destructive wild fires. Local fire authorities warn us to clear a thirty-foot radius around our property to provide a “defensible” buffer from potential fires. If you, your neighbor, or the H.O.A. has not done so, now would be a good time to clear your property. These opportunistic, fast growing weeds will not stay green much longer and even knocking them down with a weed eater can make a positive difference.

The irrigation system should be your next priority. Those of you heading to cooler climes will benefit from performing a thorough tune-up before you leave, and then lining someone up to keep an eye on things while you are gone. The most common problems you will find are bunny induced leaks and sticking valves. Both can cause severe sticker shock when you get your water bills this summer. The leaks are the easiest to find and deal with, just make sure that you run the system long enough for any problems to show up (1-2 hours). A stuck valve can be sneakier and will require diligence on your part. Flushing the system will help prevent this problem somewhat but the main culprit is our hard water. Check that the valve actually shuts down all the way when deactivated. Listening to a valve after it has supposedly shut off can sometimes catch one that is leaking; also check out the plant that is in the lowest part of the yard the next day. If you are still seeing a drip you may have an issue. Again, if you are beating the heat to another locale this summer, enlist a neighbor to watch for irrigation leaks if possible, as a stuck valve can happen at any time.

Those of you staying behind can clean the winter annuals out of the flowerbeds and commence to planting the 3 or 4 summer annuals that we have good luck with here in Arizona. My short list includes: Vinca, Cosmos, Lisianthus, and Portulaca. There are always many other varieties available at the nurseries but, for me, most seem to be wishful thinking. I do, and recommend to all, that each year you try new things. I have had some pleasant surprises over the years by taking a chance on some cute little number that caught my eye. Bat faced Cuphea (*Cuphea llavea*) and Blue Daze (*Evolvulus glomeratus*) are two prime examples that come to mind.

Shrubs, trees and cactus should have all dead and unsightly limbs removed, also in preparation for summer’s flush of growth. If you have not already done so, you can now trim rather hard, as most plants will recover quickly. As a rule, most of our desert natives do not require fertilizer, but blooming plants, such as lantana, will respond well to a high prosperous blend or foliar feed this month.

Those of you who have turf overseeded with rye grass should avoid any fertilizer applications until the rye grass has transitioned out. If you have a straight Bermuda lawn that is coming out of dormancy, a high nitrogen fertilizer will jump start its recovery.

At any rate, those of us who have been experiencing gardening withdrawals should now be in their glory, enjoying the last few weeks of spring before the triple digit temperatures of summer put us and our plants into a heat-induced stupor.