



# May Garden Tips

- Very low chance of frost in May according to the National Climate Data Center. If a frost is predicted, tender seedlings can be protected with cloches (sticks with a sheet on them or even plastic milk jugs with the bottom cut off). It is safe to plant warm-season annuals (tomatoes, peppers, basil, marigolds, petunias, and the like).
- Plant the seeds of corn, green beans, squash, cucumbers, okra, sweet potatoes and other heat-lovers until the soil has warmed to 600 F.
- YOU can move your houseplants outdoors to a shady spot. It's a good time to repot and fertilize them to ready them for a summer growth spurt.
- Plant tender summer bulbs outdoors, including glads, cannas, and tuberous begonias.
- You can still divide most perennials as long as they're not spring bloomers and as long as the foliage isn't more than 5 or 6 inches high.
- You can prune evergreens any time from now until late summer. (Don't prune later than that or you'll prompt new, tender growth that will get zapped by winter's cold.)
- By the end of the month or early next month, the soil will have warmed up enough that you can apply a layer of mulch on flower beds and around trees and shrubs. As a rule of thumb, apply this mulch once the tulips have faded. Keep new plantings well-watered.
- For mums, pinch off the last inch or so of the branches until July to assure bushy, well-flowering plants. While you're at it, cut back asters and other tall, floppy, late-summer bloomers by about one-third once they're a foot or so high. They'll be sturdier and flower better. Bee balm can be cut back by one half in early May to promote more compact growth. Bloom will be delayed about two weeks. Cut back just the front half of the clump of bee balm to develop staggered height and extend bloom time. The uncut portion will bloom at its usual time and 2 weeks later the pruned front half will bloom.
- Phlox plants can be pinched or cut back 1/2 at the end of May or in early June. Pinch sedum when plants are eight inches tall to develop compact plants. Flowering will be delayed a bit and there will be smaller but more numerous flowers produced. Additional plants that respond to pinching include yarrow, Russian sage, artemisia, balloon flower, dragonhead, veronica and Culver's root. Try pinching a few and see if you like the results. Some plants do not respond well to pinching. Often these are plants with one terminal flower spike or plants with leaves in a low rosette rather than a long stem. The unpinchables include columbine, astilbe, delphinium, daylily, coral bell, hosta, iris, foxglove and dianthus