

## Gardening Tasks for May

**During most of April, the night time temperature remained below 50 degrees, making it difficult to think about planting tomatoes.**

Now that April is in the rearview mirror, I have collected the tomatoes I want to grow this summer, and they are in the ground. I found Cherokee Purple, Super Sweet 100, and Orange Strawberry at Gamble Garden's Spring Sale. I found those tomato growing staples, Early Girl, Better Boy and Sun Gold at Summer Winds and put all of them in the wine barrels a little early, but I know they will survive! So far, the squirrels have left the tomatoes alone. Finding fish heads has been a challenge. Too many people have read The Tomato Plan from Love Apple Farm, and they must be planting tomatoes non-stop. Before placing the tomatoes in the ground, I include the following:

1 fish head, 2 crushed eggshells, one 1/2 cup bone meal, one 1/2 cup all-purpose timed release organic fertilizer, 2 T. worm castings, 2 aspirin tablets. I also strip the leaves from the tomato stem, leaving only 2 sets of leaves. This stimulates tomatoes to grow more and stronger roots.



**Time to check your irrigation system.** I think it is really important to inspect my irrigation system by turning on every station and checking for leaks, missed areas, misdirected spraying, etc. Yes, my flowers are bursting out all over. Can they survive with slightly less water? I will cut back a minute per station, and adjust the target areas. The roses are doing fine so far; potted plants are a problem. Most pots are on my front steps, and they get watered every Wednesday, but 4 days later, I check on them to make sure they are moist enough to last the week. If they seem dry, they get a quick hosing. I do add mulch on top of the potting soil, so that helps potted plants retain moisture and smothers weeds. If Spring bulbs are still blooming, adding a little fertilizer will strengthen them for next year. Label instructions say to water them for a few weeks after they finish flowering. The flower stalks can be removed, but let the leaves dry out, since they are collecting energy for next year. I eventually dig them up, divide or separate bigger bulbs, and put the all of the bulbs back in the ground. They keep coming up yearly, so they must like how they are treated!

**I have a new surprise for the neighborhood squirrel population.** Late last Spring I planted summer squash, greens and cucumbers. I was gone for a long weekend in early June. When I returned, the lovely baby veggies were nibbled down to the base of each plant. Depending on the weather we get this spring, it will be the middle of May before the soil is warm enough to plant in my three

raised beds. However, I found someone to create cages around the raised beds to make them squirrel-proof! I. am so excited to be back in the farming business!! I don't think I can stop those rats with a bushy tail from picking my green beans in the third raised bed – maybe some hot pepper spray on the plants might stop them. Stay tuned for the next chapter!

**My best squirrel deterrent so far is called "Outdoor Repeller".** You can barely see it in the photo of my tomatoes planted in barrels. It blinks and has a high-pitched sound that a few people notice when they enter my back yard. During the winter, when the only veggies are planted in kitchen window boxes, the squirrels do attack the winter lettuce despite the Outdoor Repeller. The rest of the year, the lovely "rats with bushy tails" stay away from veggies and other precious bloomers in the area surrounded by the Outdoor Repellers. I still attach to the near ripe tomatoes small water bottles containing PineSol with holes around the neck to create essence of Pine Sol.



**This Spring I followed Ray Redell's Rose feeding schedule vigorously.** [Go to \(https://gardenclubofpaloalto.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Ray-Redell-Rose-Feeding.pdf\)](https://gardenclubofpaloalto.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Ray-Redell-Rose-Feeding.pdf). My roses reacted by blossoming in a way I have never experienced before!! They are really stunning and deserve a drive-by with a honk! I did plant 4 new climbers in the front yard. I think they were too precious. They all showed their thanks by being covered with mildew, even though the roses around them have deep green leaves and bulging blossoms.

**How did your azaleas do this winter?** My azaleas had a long season and are still blooming, so I will wait to prune and feed them with an acid fertilizer as soon as they finish flowering. Same with the Camellias. I bravely moved one Camellia a year ago and it loved the new location, blossoming non-stop since October. They really are beautiful flowers who deserve to come in the house to show off in a shiny silver vase. By the way, Camellias should be pruned right after they flower and before new growth shows up. It's hard for me to tell the spent flower from the new growth unless I pull off the fading flower, since right behind the fade-out is the start of next year's flower. So pull off the faders! It's easy to do to prepare for next year.

**By the way, my very favorite flower has come back around my climbing roses: Clematis is happy this year. They want their roots in the shade and their faces in the sun.**

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