

Segment for Week of 10 May, 2021

This is Pauline Milbourne bringing you information on Shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

A Lot of people have had questions recently about plants that didn't come through the winter too well. Evergreen plants such as oleander, holly, azaleas and even wax myrtle can lose a lot of leaves and sometimes branch tips when the ground is frozen and a cold wind is blowing. Don't get in a hurry to remove what looks dead. The plants may surprise you by nearly making a full recovery if you only give it time. Once you are sure of what is alive and dead, just prune out what actually died. Some perennials are amazingly slow to get started in the spring. Perennial lantana and rose mallow are perfect examples. Don't give up too soon. However, it isn't widely understood that perennials do not live forever. By definition, an annual lives for one year, a biennial for two years and a perennial must live for at least three years. After that, all bets are off and some perennials just barely make it to the three-year mark. A hard winter can finish off a perennial that was probably too close to the end of its normal life span anyway.

As the saying goes, April showers bring may flowers, but the forecast indicates that we may have showers on and off for the next week or so. This isn't a bad thing as it will give time for our newly established plants to take off growing. Most plants that have been planted more than a year can be transferred to the "survival of the fittest" category which is a good reason to establish Eastern Shore native plants that can cope with the whims of our local weather patterns. During the growing season most plants will thrive with about one inch of water each week. If you are watering, then a good soak once a week is much more beneficial than several lighter watering's during the week. It is a misconception that plant roots grow in search of water. Roots grow in response to water. Frequent light shallow watering encourages roots to grow only in the places where you are putting the water. Shallow limited root zones make it difficult for plants survive dry

periods. Soaking the soil six to eight inches deep once a week will encourage much better root growth and provide much better drought protection.

It is also possible to kill your plants with kindness. Overwatering occurs when soil is kept too wet for too long, forcing valuable oxygen out of the soil. Oxygen is just as crucial to plant health as water. When heavy rains fall, or thorough irrigation is applied, don't water again until the soil begins to dry. While you don't want the soil to become so dry that plants begin to wilt, it is important to allow air to occupy some of the pore spaces in the soil between watering.

Also keep in mind that many plant fungal diseases are spread by splashing water during rain or irrigation. Drip or trickle irrigation will deposit the water low to the ground, keeping foliage dry; this is the most efficient way to deliver water only where needed. If watering must be overhead, try to water in the morning to promote quick drying and reduce loss due to evaporation.

For answers to Gardening questions and more, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361.