April in the Tallahassee Garden

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: If you want landscape color that will endure Tallahassee’s summers, plant tropicals such as Dipladenia now.

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Lawns: If you want to fertilize your lawn this spring, April is the time to do it. Wait until two to three weeks after the grass completely greens up. Use no more than six pounds of 15-0-15 fertilizer. Select a 15-0-15 fertilizer with 7.5% slow-release nitrogen. Water the fertilizer in lightly with about ¼ inch of water. Consider setting your mower on its highest setting now. Mowing grass too short is one of the primary causes of lawn decline. If you have centipede grass do not over manage it--think benign neglect. Also, this is the time to plant plugs for centipede, Bermuda, Zoysia, and St. Augustine lawns. It is best to water your lawn deeply, but less frequently, to encourage deep root growth. An established lawn needs about one inch of water per week, and you can apply ½ inch per watering. Early spring when fire ants are dormant is the best time to apply a fire ant control containing fipronil, such as Over ‘N Out. Fire ants begin to die in 7-14 days and are virtually eliminated in six weeks. This product is applied with a spreader over the entire yard. Manufacturers recommend applying this product yearly.

Pruning: By the end of the month most azaleas will be done blooming. Other winter and spring flowering plants and trees, like spirea, Indian hawthorn, camellias, and dogwoods can also be pruned immediately after blooming if it’s needed. Pruning them later in the year after they have begun to set flower buds will severely limit their blooms next year.

Annuals: April is the ideal time to set out or seed sunflowers, cockscomb, zinnias and other sun-loving annuals. Be sure to choose a well-drained, sunny site. For shady areas, plant impatiens, jacobinia and hydrangeas.

Perennials: Plant agapanthus, pentas, lantana, rudbeckia and verbena.
Bulbs: Now, as the soil warms up, is the time to plant caladiums. Be sure to choose a variety that suits the spot; some will tolerate lots of sun and some not so well. You can still plant amaryllis bulbs which will come back each year. Other bulbs you might consider are lilies, dahlias, gladiolus, and cannas.

Vegetables: It is time to set out tomato and pepper plants, sweet corn, cucumbers, squash, eggplant, okra, zucchini, cantaloupes and watermelons. Plant them in full sun for best results and water daily.

Tropicals: You don’t have to do without the beautiful tropicals that you see in south Florida. You can plant them this month and enjoy them until November (or later). Think of them as annuals, but some may overwinter here if planted in a protected spot. Hibiscus, allamanda, mandevilla, Tecoma stans, and other tropicals will provide abundant color in your garden.

Mulch: Be sure to add mulch to newly planted beds and trees. Mulch should be three to four inches deep but should not touch the trunks of the plants. The mulch will discourage weed growth and prevent water loss through evaporation.

Wildlife: Consider planting firebush, cross vine, shrimp plant, trumpet vine and other orange and red-flowered plants that attract hummingbirds. A combination of a hummingbird feeder and plants that attract them will guarantee that you’ll enjoy these amazing birds that are returning to the area now and will remain until October. Many of the same plants will attract butterflies. This is also the time to put out bluebird, chickadee and wood duck boxes and to clean boxes that were left out from last season.

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