April may be hot and dry, or damp and chilly, and brings no shortage of work to be done in the garden.

**Lawns** can be fertilized this month, preferably after the second or third mowing. Use a fertilizer with a 15-0-15 analysis and with half of the nitrogen (represented by the first number) in a slow-release form. Apply fertilizer when grass leaves are dry, and follow with ¼ inch of irrigation. Don’t fertilize before a rainstorm, as the product may be washed away from the lawn and into the nearest lake, river or stream, a major cause of pollution. Centipede grass is naturally yellow-green rather than a deep green color and may decline if fertilized too frequently, or with too much nitrogen. Lawns may be plugged now to thicken grass in thin areas.

**Trees and Shrubs** planted in April need close monitoring to be certain that water needs are met. If rainfall isn’t sufficient, new plants will need to be watered often throughout the growing season. Consider marking the space for new shrubs and trees now and waiting until fall to plant, allowing easier establishment with less input of water.
Flower Gardening is great fun now as many annuals, perennials, and bulbs may be planted, along with tropical foliage plants. Start seeds or set plants of such annuals as osteospermum, sunflowers, cosmos, marigolds, zinnias, and celosia. Plant pentas, lantana, purple coneflower, rudbeckia, verbena, milkweeds, and salvias, among the many other perennial species to be found at the garden center. Summer flowering bulbs such as agapanthus, dahlias, gladiolus, cannas and caladiums (grown for colorful foliage) can be planted as well. Cool weather flowers are nearing the end of their season, but flowering may be prolonged somewhat by deadheading pansies, snapdragons, and calendula. Consider pulling them out to replace with warm weather crops before the weather gets too hot, making it more difficult to establish new plantings. Begonias especially benefit from planting when the soil is cool.

Vegetable Gardening is in full swing in April. Tomatoes should have been planted last month, but if planting now, choose varieties that are fast-maturing or heat tolerant. Roma and other pear-shaped varieties can be planted now. Plant beans, peppers, eggplant, melons, squash, corn, cucumbers, okra and field-type peas. Fertilize monthly, using a product specific for vegetable gardens, and monitor frequently to meet water needs and keep pests at bay. Hand picking will control many pests, such as hornworms on tomatoes, and a sharp stream of water may control aphids, flea beetles and other pests. Consider using organic fertilizers such as composted cow manure, and organic pesticides such as BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) or Rotenone. Mulch with clean straw or hay.

Gardening Chores include mulching beds with pine straw or shredded bark to suppress weeds and retain soil moisture. Mulch to a depth of 3 to 4 inches but keep it a few inches away from the trunks of trees and stems of shrubs. Many spring flowering shrubs will finish blooming by the end of the month and can be pruned then. Azaleas should be pruned before July to prevent cutting off next year’s flower buds. Camellias can be pruned in April before new growth begins, or you can wait until summer – if excessive sap is seen when pruning, wait a month and try again. Care in controlling emerging weeds now will pay off later in the summer when they’ll have grown larger and more difficult to eradicate.

###