Is It Spring Yet?

Photo by David W. Marshall: Verbena is one of many annuals that can be planted now in sunny areas for seasonal color

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The calendar says APRIL in big bold capital letters with exclamation marks!! Get out the iced tea glasses and dust the cobwebs off the porch ceiling. Finally your feet are warm.

Finally things are growing. This includes the grass. If you want your grass to grow more or spread to cover bare areas you can fertilize this month. Don’t think of doing this until the grass has greened up and you have mowed the lawn a time or two. This is how you tell the grass is actually coming out of dormancy. You laugh but you’d be surprised how many people don’t think of this. Use a 15-0-15 analysis with 7.5 percent water-insoluble or slow-release nitrogen at a rate of no more than 6 pounds per 1000 square feet of lawn.

My favorite thing to do this month is plant caladiums. Well, it’s not really the planting I like so much as those splashes of pink and red and white in the shadows under the trees. One caladium grower on-line warned that the caladiums may come up later this year because of our cold winter temperatures. The ground needs to be 70 degrees. This usually happens in early April so it might work better to wait until the middle of the month or later. Caladiums are unmoved by the impatience of us gardeners. They will not budge by growing even a single leaf until they are good and warm.

Okay, you have sat inside all winter long and now you will visit your local nursery and buy every beautiful plant in sight that is not nailed down. I can see an intervention may be necessary. So, take a breath. Now take a moment to think about the site you wish to plant. Is it sunny or shady? Do you want something permanent there, or do you prefer
bright color that may only last one season? Annuals give lots of color, but most are seasonal, lasting only through the spring or summer. They won’t return next year. You have to select a perennial for that.

Some possibilities for a sunny spot are celosia, sun coleus, gomphrena, iris, lantana, marigold, pentas, portulaca, verbena, vinca, and narrow-leaf zinnia. For shade or part shade try begonia, blue daze, caladium, coleus, impatiens, Persian shield, and torenia. A few of my favorite annuals to grow from seed are Cosmos sulphureas, Heavenly Blue morning glory and Oklahoma Mix zinnias. Some easy to grow perennials that will return year after year are purple coneflowers, black-eyed susans, agapanthus, and salvias.

It is time to add organic matter and fertilizer to the vegetable beds you intend to plant. Dig in some compost, manure, or leaf mold. Add fertilizer. Smooth the surface of the soil and you are ready to go. Some lucky gardeners may have sweet, juicy sugar snap peas to snack on while pulling weeds and putting in tomato, eggplant, sweet potato and pepper plants. Sow seeds of cantaloupe and watermelon, okra, southern peas, corn, soy beans, green beans, cucumbers, and squash. Plant basil, chives, dill, and mint to spice up those vegetables.

Some pruning and mulching can be done almost every month in the garden and April is no exception. Prune spring-flowering shrubs such as azaleas and spirea once they are finished blooming. Make sure all your beds are well mulched. Mulch suppresses weeds and helps to keep the soil cool and moist. Be sure to keep a close eye on all your new plants. They will need regular watering to get established.

At the end of the day sit on the porch and remind yourself how lucky you are to have a patch of dirt to dig in. Sip or guzzle your iced tea. Life is good.

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