

April in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Perennials such as black-eyed Susans can be divided and planted now.

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By now we should be frost-free, but there is another weather concern. April is our second driest month. Be prepared to irrigate when your plants show stress from dry weather. Shallow watering is a waste of water because it doesn't penetrate deep enough and encourages shallow, drought sensitive root systems. One-half to three quarters an inch of water a week should be applied if it hasn't rained.

Keep plants mulched. Mulch helps conserve moisture during dry weather and has the added benefit of minimizing weeds.

Trees and Shrubs

- This is the month trees and shrubs begin actively growing. Watch for aphids. They literally suck the life out of new leaves. They'll leave a sticky substance where sooty mold will develop and thrive. To avoid sooty mold problems later on, control aphids now! Aphids can be safely controlled on most plants with insecticidal soap.
- Freeze damaged citrus should not be pruned until June, or after a good flush of growth; then remove all dead and weakened parts, cutting into live, healthy wood.

Perennials

- Divide clumps of herbaceous perennials like bee balm, black-eyed Susans, shasta daisies, daylilies, fern-leaf yarrow, stokesia, and chrysanthemums to expand garden beds or pass along plants to friends. Now is a good time to plant new perennials also.

Annuals

- Plant seeds of heat loving annuals such as celosia, gloriosa daisy, marigold, portulaca, rudbeckia, and zinnia. Seeds may be sown directly in the ground where plants are to grow or in pots or flats for transplanting later. Of course, the easy way to grow annuals is to buy bedding plants from your favorite nursery. In the shade try begonias or impatiens. New varieties of coleus do well in sun or shade and provide vivid colors and patterns for months.

Bulbs

- Bulbs will rot if they don't get good drainage, except for cannas; they'll grow right at the edge of a lake. Consider them for lush foliage by your garden pond.
- Replant caladium bulbs that were dug last fall and stored for the winter.
- Louisiana iris thrives in most soil types and makes a beautiful cut flower.

Roses

- To aid in disease control, remove old mulch from around roses, and apply a fresh, 3-inch layer of bark or pine straw. Begin spraying programs for roses to help prevent powdery mildew and black-spot. Or plant some of the low-maintenance rose types, such as Knock Out and Mrs. B.R. Cant, that don't require spraying.

Lawn

- Wait until mid-April to fertilize or until at least three weeks after spring "green-up." For our warm season grasses to efficiently use fertilizer, consistently warmer nights are required. Otherwise the fertilizer is wasted and pollutes the downstream environment.
- Many lawn problems mimic insect damage. But few, if any, insect pests are likely to be active this early in the season. Confirm the damage is being caused by insects before applying an insecticide.

Vegetables

- Towards the end of the month, after the soil warms, mulch vegetables well to prevent weeds and conserve water
- Most anything for the spring vegetable garden can be planted now. Continue planting vegetables such as snap beans, pole beans, southern peas, and summer spinach this month. Also, cantaloupe, corn, cucumbers, kohlrabi, peppers, pumpkins, squash, tomatoes, turnip greens and watermelons can be planted now.
- But hold off on lima beans and okra, and other heat-loving veggies, until the end of the month or later.

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