

Gardening tips for April

For those of a certain age you may remember the spaghetti tree April fool. This BBC Panorama article followed a family during the 1957 spaghetti harvest in Switzerland. However, there are many genuinely strange plants. Who would have thought that loofahs really do grow on trees (half hardy annuals really). Broccoli trees really do exist, as well as the Gumbo-Limbo Tourist tree (named because its bark is red and peeling just like a tourist), or the Cannonball tree so named for its notable large woody fruit, 20 cm in diameter, the perfect size for cannonballs.

But have you ever seen an *Aprilis stultus*? A magnificent specimen tree with huge blush pink flowers, when dried the largest petals can be used for making slippers, or if shredded used to make the bright pink Kashmiri chai (that's the petals not the slippers!)



The kitchen garden

At the time of writing there is a new 'gold rush' on the high street with shoppers clamouring for the ever-dwindling supplies of tomatoes and cucumbers. But fear not, help is at hand, the gardening growing season is upon us and now is your chance to start growing your own. Don't just stop at tomatoes and cucumbers, other fruit and veg are easily grown from seed or small plants all available from your nearest garden centre, or if you wait until April, you can visit the EGRGA Plant Sale (see box on page xx) for young veg plants and much more at very reasonable prices.

The Royal Horticultural Society has been inundated with enquiries on how to grow fruit and veg since tomato/cucumber-gate! Advice on growing is readily supplied by the growers, the back of a packet of seeds or the plant label contain enough information on how to grow your chosen varieties. What you do need to do though is prepare the ground. Dig it over, remove the weeds, have a cup of tea, remove the weeds again, incorporate some peat free compost (see compost corner) and/or manure and get planting.

The flower garden

Talking of weeds, they don't just flourish in the kitchen garden, they are quite happy taking over the flower borders so weeding also needed here. The weeds can be composted in a bin. This is worth doing if you have the space as it will give you compost to dig into the garden next year.

Garden centres will be full of tempting flowering plants therefore it is very tempting to buy them, plant them in the garden and watch them succumb to the weather. This can happen because the plants purchased are a few weeks ahead of the season because they have been 'brought on' early by the growers. Therefore, if buying plants that may be tender to the elements, keep an eye on the weather forecast and be prepared to cover plants to protect them from the weather. Horticultural fleece is the stuff to buy or you can use old blankets or towels or plastic sheet but do remember to remove it the following morning (especially plastic sheet as it is not ideal but does the job).

Lawns

This time last year, we had all started cutting our lawns, this year lawn cutting is only just getting started, whenever you start cutting the same advice remains, start with light trim and reduce the cutting height in small stages for the next 2 or 3 cuts. Never cut the grass so short that it changes colour, that is called a cricket wicket which is fine for playing cricket but not for a verdant vernal vista from your veranda.

Compost corner

If you can make it yourself this can save a lot of money but it requires time and space, so most of us probably head to the garden centre to buy from their ready supply of conveniently bagged offerings. Before choosing, have you thought what it is made of? Traditionally, compost has contained peat and there can be no doubt that peat containing composts are excellent but their extraction is an environmental disaster. Peat extraction contributes about 5% of carbon dioxide into the global atmosphere, whereas peat bogs amount to about 0.3% of global biomass. Garden centres are already switching to peat free products and will be legally obliged to stop selling peat in any form from 2024. So now is as good a time as any to make the switch and learn to garden peat free. You will feel better for it.

For previous editions of gardening tips, membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to our website www.gardenreg.org.

Keep gardening.

Richard Haigh
EGRGA Communications