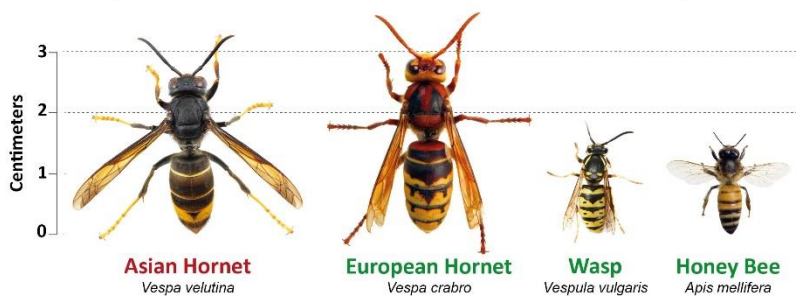


Gardening tips for April

I start with a request for vigilance! The countryside, rivers and seas around the UK as well as our gardens are increasingly at risk from non-native species. These take the form of animals such as birds, frogs, fish and crayfish, plants such as sea myrtle and water primrose to insects, most notably the Asian hornet. For more information about non-native species and what part you can play in their identification and eradication go to www.nonnativespecies.org.

Regarding the Asian hornet, it is important to report any suspected sightings of this species as soon as possible. Vigilance is particularly required in southern parts of England. The Asian hornet is active mainly between April and November therefore now is a good time to familiarise yourself with its appearance and action to be taken as it is a possible garden visitor and therefore there is a chance you could find one.

Think you've seen an Asian Hornet? Report it!



Report through the Asian Hornet Watch app or www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport



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And now for a bit of gardening.

The kitchen garden

If you have been getting your seed potatoes ready for planting just wait a moment because there are some very clever new varieties available. The McSolanium Brothers in Scotland have a new variety for April, the easy chip seed potato. These potatoes have been bred so that once you harvest them and

peel the skin off, they instantly split apart into either French fries or chunky chips depending on which variety you choose.

If growing fruit, get ready to protect flowers from frosts, unopened buds aren't too much of a problem as they are protected to some degree by their high sugar content but as they begin to unfurl, they become vulnerable, so if your fruit trees are small enough apply protection in the form of horticultural fleece to help keep the frost at bay. Large trees may have to be left to fend for themselves and hopefully not all blossoms will be lost.

Weeds will now be running rampant so get digging them out to compost them. However, if they are couch grass, bindweed, creeping buttercup or dandelions reach for the garden recycling bin or hot composter if you have one. Alternatively, learn to live with your weeds, dandelions for example are valuable to wildlife, providing food to many insects and birds. Their nectar- and pollen-rich flowers appear over a long period and are loved by bees and butterflies – which is why dandelions are included on the RHS Plants for Pollinators list. This list is exhaustive so go to the RHS website and search plants for pollinators to see all plants recommended.

It's that tomato growing time of year again. If you grow your tomatoes in a greenhouse, you have probably started growing already; for those of us who grow outdoors, April is time to get your seeds planted. Start them off on a windowsill in the house and pot on when big enough to handle, when they can be picked up by a leaf rather than their delicate stem.

The flower garden

Prepare beds for the growing season. Dig in a covering of compost or well-rotted manure incorporating a general-purpose fertiliser, such as our old friend pelleted chicken manure, or try fish, blood and bone but only if you don't have a dog to dig up all your good work.

Tie climbing roses to their supports bending upright stems over to encourage more flowers.

Lift and divide established perennials such as Hostas and replant around the garden.

Lawns

If the bog garden has started to recede and started looking more like the lawn, time to get mowing if not already started. It is still a bit early to go for the ultra-short No. 1 so try leaving the grass longer for a greener healthier lawn

and if the occasional dandelion should make an appearance, celebrate it rather than digging it out but this all depends on they type of lawn required, a stripy showstopper with nothing out of place or a play lawn with something green to cover the mud.

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
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