

Gardening tips for April

Oak before ash, we're in for a splash.

Ash before oak we're in for a soak.

In other words, prepare to get wet, April showers - something we should all look forward to. If they happen, the pulsing bursts of heavy rain loads up the ground just as it is being warmed by the sun, perfect growing conditions. All your seed packets saying plant in March are now back in the seed box, time to get the April ones out.

The veg patch

This is a busy month. The temptation is to plant anything to get an early start. Outdoors this can be risky therefore plant indoors and make use of all those windowsills that are normally covered with ornaments that you don't know what to do with.

First early potatoes planted in March should have green shoots, earth them up to create a neat ridge. This is handy for knowing where they are but more importantly will help to increase yield. Plant second earlies and main crop.

Plant shallots, onion sets and leeks outdoors.

Tomatoes

Re-pot tomato seedlings into bigger pots as soon as their leaves are big enough to handle. Don't handle by their stems as this can crush them. Keep indoors until end of May.

The flower garden

You know it is spring because the weeds are looking down at you. Time to get them out of the borders and on to the compost heap.

Other pests on the move are slugs, before reaching for the slug pellets (from March this year only ferric phosphate pellets are available, these are approved for organic growers) try beer traps and/or eggshells. Egg shells need to be baked in the oven then ground up into pieces approximately 3 to 4 mm to provide an uncomfortable (for slugs) surface around the tastiest plants. The shell will in time add calcium to the soil.

Don't be tempted to get your summer bedding plants too soon, they will need frost protection and if you haven't got it you will end up back at the garden centre buying more. Wait until May.

Protect fruit blossoms from late frosts. Watch the weather forecast and if necessary, cover fruit blossom with horticultural fleece or old sheets.

Tie in climbing and rambling roses and feed with rose fertiliser.

Feed other shrubs. A general feed such as pelleted chicken manure (it isn't as bad as it sounds!) is readily available from garden centres and is easy to scatter around the borders and lightly hoe into the soil surface.

Sow hardy annuals, herbs and wildflower seed directly outdoors.

Start to feed citrus plants. Prune fig trees. Divide bamboos

Plant summer flowering bulbs such as gladioli and lily and also alliums.

The water garden

As the water temperature increases, fish will become more active and need feeding. If you have a water pump with filter it is worth having a look at the condition of the filter and giving it a clean if necessary.

If waterlily leaves were crowded and sticking out of the water last year, now is the time to divide them.

Lawns

Have you managed to cut the grass? Now that you have, the popular pastime of mowing the grass every weekend has started.

When mowing the grass, the cutting height can be gradually shortened week by week but try not to cut too short, slightly longer grass keeps a better colour and helps to suppress the weeds.

Sow new lawns now to take advantage of the improving weather conditions. Repair bare patches in established lawns.

If your lawn needs some TLC, now is the time to rake out the old thatch and treat with weed and feed. Get some with added moss killer if needed.

And finally, your trusty old lawnmower, when did it last have a service?

For membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to our website www.gardenreg.org.

Keep gardening.

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