

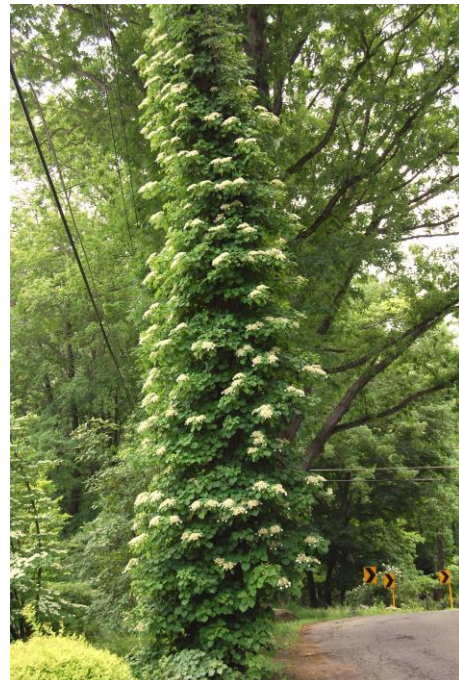
Gardening Notes for April

With COVID finally becoming less impactful in our lives, the act of getting out into your Garden still remains a great option for getting exercise and fresh air. Many of us have come to appreciate the beauty of plants and the calming act of working in the soil. Sales of vegetable and annual seeds continue to remain strong as we eagerly await these warmer days of April for seeding! As the sun and warmth of April unfold, take a deep breath and prioritize what must be completed vs. what could be postponed for a day or two. Also, spring is a time to begin anew, so give thought on how you could change things up a bit, whether it be containers or perhaps a new garden! HAPPY SPRING!

Things to do:

Garden

- Early April is a time to prune vines, such as Wisteria, Climbing Hydrangea and Clematis. All too often Wisteria vines do not bloom because they were pruned too heavily throughout the growing season. The plants respond by producing more vegetative foliage, but few flower spurs. Wisteria is a legume and should not be fertilized either, as it fixes its own Nitrogen. Once the plant has bloomed, take note of the short flower spurs (they will have a bean-like fruit pod attached). During the late winter, remove all or part of the stem above the spurs in order to ensure flowering for the coming year.
- *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris* (Climbing Hydrangea vine pictured at right) and *Schizophragma hydrangeoides* (Climbing Hydrangea Vine pictured at the article's end) produce flowers on stems that project 12-24" out from the supporting wall or tree and these stems should not be pruned as they sport the flower buds.
- There are three general types of Clematis and techniques for pruning, which are divided into Type A, B and C. For type A, the flowers bloom on last year's wood, and they should be pruned just after bloom. An example would be *Clematis montana*. Type B blooms on both last year's wood as well as current year's wood. At the end of winter, these plants should be pruned back to just above two large and vigorous appearing buds, roughly 3-5' high on the vine. An example is *Clematis* 'Nelly Moser'. Lastly,



Type C blooms entirely on new wood, such as *Clematis orientalis*, the Orange Peel Clematis. These vines can be cut back hard or lightly trimmed.

- Finish pruning woody plants, roses and coppiced plants, such as Red Stemmed Dogwoods (*Cornus sericea* and its cultivars) by mid-April.
- Mulch planting beds! For perennial gardens, I have become fond of cutting the brown foliage and stems of perennials into 4-6" long pieces and allowing them to act as a mulch (pictured above right). In order to keep the bed looking tidy, the edges of the beds can be mulched with shredded bark.
- Divide grasses and perennials if necessary. Remember, the central portion of the plant (a 25-year-old *Miscanthus* pictured at right) is the oldest and most likely dead.



The outer, vigorous ring will yield at least 10 new plants, with 9 of those going to friends, a new garden, or a curbside sale!

- If your Narcissus have stopped blooming, they may have been planted too shallow. Plants can be dug, divided and replanted while in leaf, as seen at right.
- As soon as the early blooming bulbs (such as Snowdrops, Winter Aconites, Snowflakes and Scilla) have finished blooming, the clumps can be dug, divided and moved about the garden if so wished. These bulbs are equally as successfully to move in spring while actively growing as when purchased as dormant bulbs in autumn. Bulbs like Snowdrops also have tremendous variation under close inspection and the most interesting can be divided and multiplied. I have had poor luck planting Snowflake (*Leucojum vernum*) in the fall, but great luck



moving them about in the spring. It is also financially more prudent!

- If you overwintered Hardy Banana (*Musa basjoo*) outside under cover of leaves, remove the insulating leaves and the surrounding cage.
- Continue potting up Canna, Banana, Alocasia and other tropical plants that were overwintered in the basement or heated garages. Make certain to test the tubers to ensure they have no soft spots or decay.
- Apply corn meal gluten to flower beds as a weed pre-emergent and mild fertilizer as an organic alternative.
- Visit nurseries frequently to see the new plants that are arriving weekly.
- Apply corn meal gluten to flower beds as a weed pre-emergent and mild fertilizer as an organic alternative to a chemical pre-emergent.
- Time to empty the winter decorations from the containers and add color. Options abound for colorful container combinations. Pansies and violas are always a good option, but so are cool season vegetables, such as lettuce and spinach. In the container at right, the dark purple lettuce makes for a nice backdrop to the pansies. A great chartreuse accent is the the grassy foliage of *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon', (Golden Sweet Flag) pictured at right.



Turf

- Edge bedlines and compost the pieces of turf that have been removed.
- Finish thatching and raking lawns. Apply a pre-emergent crabgrass control to established lawns before or during Forsythia bloom, if crabgrass was a severe problem in 2022.
- Apply fertilizer and lime to lawns and as prescribed by soil test results.

Vegetables

- Submit soil sample for nutrient and pH tests.
- In early April for those in Southern locations, later for those more Northern areas, seed can be sown directly in the garden for Beets, Carrots, Spinach, Cilantro, Lettuce, Arugula, Mustard Greens, Bok Choy, Peas and Turnips.
- For the Vegetable Garden, finish sowing tomato, pepper, and eggplant seeds.

Earlier seeded Lettuce, Swiss chard, broccoli and cabbage seedlings can now be planted outside, especially under low tunnels or in protected containers on decks



or patios. For tomatoes, if you sowed your seed in a tray and the first leaves or Cotyledons are now well developed, tease apart the seedlings and install the plants in individual cells. Tomato seedlings can be planted deep, since roots will develop along the entire stem, providing a stout and strong plant (see images above – before planting on the left, planted to the proper depth on the right).

- Resist the urge to turn over or work the soil in vegetable gardens if the soil is too moist. If you can form baseballs from the soil, it needs a few more days to drain!
- It is best to use a soil broadfork (as seen at right) by pushing it into the ground and rocking it back and forth to loosen the soil, vs. using a rototiller. Breaking apart the soil damages the beneficial soil borne mycorrhizae, which help the growth of your vegetables. It is also far quieter!
- It is time to plant potatoes, as they are typically planted 2-3 weeks prior to the frost-free date (May 15 in central NJ). Use 'seed' potatoes from a seed company and resist using potatoes that you have bought at a grocery store that are sprouting!



Houseplants

- With the increase in daylength, houseplants are starting to grow and will benefit from an application of liquid fertilizer. Typically dilute the fertilizer by 50% and apply monthly from April through September.
- The more root bound houseplants can be repotted in a larger pot too! The receiving pot should be 1-2" larger than the original container and preferably it should be clay and not plastic (as pictured below right). Clay allows air and water to pass through the pot. Air is obviously beneficial for root respiration, while the



passage of water cools the root run during the heat of summer. The limited upsizing of the container is important for preventing overwatering. The added soil obviously lacks roots and as a result, holds larger amounts of water. Make certain to position the soil of the plant such that it is ½” below the rim of the pot, as seen above left. This will prevent water from overflowing the container. Also, check the potting soil for fertilizer. Many soils contain slow-release fertilizer, which will prove adequate for several months of feeding.



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