Gardening Calendar for April

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For gardening purposes, I consider April as the first warm weather month.

The lawn begins serious growth in April. Don’t be confused by the decline of the rescue grass annual bluegrass and other winter weeds. They will die in the heat in time for the warm weather lawn grasses to fill the space.

Mow St Augustine at 3 inches, zoysia grass at 2 inches, Bermuda grass at 1.5 inches or shorter, and buffalo grass at 5 inches or taller. After you mow your lawn grass twice, fertilize with a slow-release lawn fertilizer like 19-5-9. The slow release lawn fertilizer releases half of the nitrogen quickly and half is released over the next 4 months. If the fertilizer label does not tell you what setting to use to apply 5lbs of fertilizer over 1000 sq. ft., set it at the second lowest application setting.

In the vegetable garden plant tomato, pepper and eggplant transplants. Try Red Deuce, the new Rodeo tomato release if you want large fruit on a relatively small plant. Other recommended tomatoes include Tycoon, BHN 968, Solar Fire, Phoenix, 602, 444, Tigress, Valley Cat, and Celebrity. The best combination of characteristics for our conditions are heat tolerance, disease resistance, nematode resistance, and a determinate growth habit. The determinate growth habit means that the variety stops growing foliage and sets fruit quickly enough to beat the heat of summer.

Plant green beans, summer squash, sweet corn, and cucumbers by seed as early in the month as possible. Later in the month plant okra by seed. Pepper and eggplant transplants can also be place in the garden in April. Peppers and tomatoes such as BHN 968, Tycoon, and Red Deuce do well in large containers on the patio if they have full sun.

Snapdragons, dianthus, pansies, cyclamen, and primula should be attractive through April. For summer color in the sun plant zinnias, purslane, moss rose, and cosmos by seed or transplant in the sun. For shade use caladium, coleus, begonias, or pentas.

Vinca transplants can be placed in the garden in full sun in April if you obtain the Cora selection. If Cora is not available wait until mid-summer to plant vinca. Cora is resistant to the aerial phytophera that kills the species in the spring. Deer do not eat vinca.

One of the showiest blooms for April is that produced by pomegranate. The multi-petaled blooms are followed by a nutritious, tasty fruit that rates high as a health food. There are many selections of pomegranate.” Wonderful” is the traditional selection but visit plantanswers.com to find a variety that meets your preferences for growth habit, fruit size, and seed edibility. Area nurseries have 8to 10 varieties from which to select. In my neighborhood deer do not browse on pomegranate.

Peach, plum, pear and apple trees should all have small fruit set. To protect the fruit from stink bugs and other insects, spray every week with Sevin or malathion. Use Captan to protect them from fungal diseases. Organic gardeners can try sulfur products, neem oil, and organic insecticides.

For the butterflies plant milkweed, citrus, dill, passion vine, sunflowers, flame acanthus, esperanza, and mistflower.

If you need a vine to cover a view consider cross vine or butterfly vine. Both have attractive blooms, cover fences well, but do not take over the neighborhood. Both should be planted in full sun. Butterfly vine is usually not eaten by deer.

Oak wilt is an ongoing problem in our region. It is very difficult to treat but relatively easy to prevent. The key to prevention is to paint every wound on oak trees immediately after they are made or detected. The disease carriers and spores are particularly active in mild weather such as what we expect in April.