

Gardening Calendar for April

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Early April is a good time to plant tomatoes. The soil is warm enough for them to continue the growth they experienced at the nursery or if they were potted up. Plant them into a soil enriched with compost and 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer over every 100 sq. ft. of bed. The soil should be moist when the tomatoes are planted. If it hasn't rained, sprinkling works. Provide 3 ft. of space between each plant and surround the plant with a tomato cage for support. Live oak leaves work very well as a mulch. If you have a history of nematodes use one of the nematode resistant tomato varieties such as Valley Cat, BHN 968, Celebrity, or Tycoon. Other good determinate or semi-determinate varieties are Phoenix, 444, Sunbrite, Ruby Crush, and 602. BHN 968 and Ruby Crush are both cherry tomatoes with outstanding flavor.

Pepper transplants can also be planted in a container or the garden. Plant green beans, cucumbers, summer squash, cantaloupe, and watermelon with seed. If you have had problems with squash vine borer, replace the crookneck variety with tatum squash. Keep the onions well fertilized. If they are planted closer than 6 inches apart, harvest the in-between plants for green onions now so that there is enough space for bulb production.

In the flower garden, zinnias can be planted by seed or transplants. They are one of the favorite butterfly nectar plants in addition to being showy as a bedding plant and excellent as a cut flower. The Dreamland zinnia is available as transplants at most nurseries. Use seed for California Giant and Cactus. Other good nectar sources are mistflower, porter weed, and milkweed. Milkweed is the only species of plant on which Monarch butterflies will lay their eggs.

Spread cosmos seed in your wildflower beds to provide attractive color while the bluebonnets and other wildflowers mature their seed. It is called the "ugly period" as the wildflowers produce the seed.

For your shady gardens use begonias, coleus or caladium for color. I especially like the Whopper Begonia. In addition to zinnias and cosmos, consider moss roses for full sun.

Sometime in April your lawn will be ready for fertilizer. After the real grass (not grassy weeds) is mowed twice it indicates that the grass can efficiently use the fertilizer. Mow St Augustine at 3.5 inches or taller, mow zoysia at 2 inches and mow Bermuda at 1.5 inches or less. Treat buffalo grass as a ground cover and mow it at 5 inches or higher. If it is mowed shorter, the weeds, usually Bermuda grass, end up taking over.

Keep your spray program for peaches going right up to harvest. Check the label of your insecticide to see how much time must pass before the last spray and harvest. Malathion is the usual insect control and captan is effective to control fungus diseases.

For your hybrid tea roses an effective spray regime includes acephate for insects and triforine for fungus diseases. Organic gardeners can try Rose Defense which has neem oil as an active ingredient.