

April in your garden...

Spring has sprung! Time to do some serious planting, pruning, snail stomping. My azaleas, camellias, and rhodies still have not finished blooming and they have been at it since December! But when they are done, I will carefully pick off the last spent flowers, because the growth tips are right behind those blooms, lightly prune to shape the shrub, clean up any dropped flowers, feed with an acid fertilizer, and add mulch, keeping it at least an inch away from the trunk.



For me, Spring means time to brighten up the garden. I change the border around the lawn in front eventually. First I buy Petunias (I love Supertunias!), Marigolds, Violas, and Rudbeckia in 6-packs as soon as they arrive in the nurseries. I transplant them immediately into 4-inch pots and nurse them along until I have time to plant them. I also plant one Marigold plant and one Basil plant near each tomato plant, so I need them to be ready to transplant by May 1 when I plant tomatoes.

April is the time when I look closely at my perennials, to see which need dividing, which look too raggedy to continue, and which need severe pruning. I use Peter Pan Agapanthus as a border, so I divide them every three or four years by digging them out of their holes. Then I split them in quarters with a shovel, replant one quarter in the hole with added compost, pot up the other three in gallon containers, and give them away. I also have divided echinacea and the babies are growing nicely.

Did you know that April is Beef Up Your Soil Month? I spread my home - grown compost about two inches thick all over the garden, and then add mulch to hold in moisture. Ciardella's sells 1 cu.ft. bags of mushroom compost, even better than my home-grown variety. This is the month I start planning my summer vegetable garden. I plant seeds of green beans, carrots, beets, zucchini, cucumbers, sunflowers, not in the ground as dinner for snails and slugs, but in flats, close to the house. I nurse them along until May 1, switching them to 4-inch pots when 2 sets of real leaves appear. Most of the veggies then go in 3 raised beds that have full sun all day.

By the way, some composters who use plastic containers are being plagued by swarms of fruit flies. My suggestion is to balance out greens (nitrogen) and browns (carbon). Give the compost a good supply of shredded newspaper and dry leaves. Keep in mind that balancing green and brown means 3 parts of carbon or brown for every 1 part of nitrogen or green. Kitchen scraps, grass clippings, garden trimmings are all considered green or nitrogen. So you need three times as much carbon, or browns. And keep the mixture moist. Also, I turn my compost once a week, switching it from Bin #1 to Bin #2 and then back to Bin#1. After 4 or 5

weeks of turning, the compost goes into Bin#3, and I start all over again. I also keep the bins moist and covered with tarps. Let me know if this correction to your compost eliminates flies.

I started feeding my roses in March, and they are leafing out nicely. In April, I will continue to follow Ray Redell's Rose Feeding Plan. The first week I feed each rose 1 cup of ammonium sulfate, 21-0-0, sprinkled evenly and scratched in around the drip line of the rose in a trough. The third week I will feed them with 3/4 cup Magnesium Sulfate (Epsom Salts) per bush. After feeding, I water them well so their little moats are moist. This feeding program assumes that each rose has been well mulched around the trough. According to Ray Redell, mulch provides the perfect medium over which concentrated fertilizer should be applied. By June, my roses look like they are on steroids!

Happy Gardening,
Vicki Sullivan