



April Gardening Tips

In the ornamental garden:

- **Cut back ornamental grasses as soon as possible if you haven't already done so.** It is important to do this before new growth begins. To make this job more manageable, tie twine around the stand of stalks before you cut stems at the base. You will be left with a bundle to pick up instead of a mess.
- **Prune late-flowering clematis.** Clematis vines that don't bloom until mid-June can be pruned in early April. If you are trying to cover an arbor or trellis, just cut stems back to a healthy bud. If the vine has become a tangled mess or you haven't pruned your clematis at all in a few years, cut it back to a healthy bud at 12- to 18-inches from the ground.
- **Don't work the soil when it's wet.** As anxious as you are to start playing in your garden, you can destroy the structure of the soil if you start while it's still too wet. To determine if your soil is ready, pick up a handful and squeeze it. If the soil stays in a muddy ball when you open your hand, wait several days and try again. If the soil crumbles easily, you're ready to go.
- **Continue cutting back perennials.** Put foliage in the compost pile, unless it was diseased.
- **Don't have a compost pile? Start one.** Compost improves the structure of the soil so that it can better retain nutrients, moisture and air. Compost also attracts and feeds earthworms, and plants grown in compost-enriched soil are more resistant to damage from insects and disease.
- **Fertilize bulbs as they finish blooming.** After flowering, bulbs begin the process of storing energy for next year's flowers. The foliage also manufactures food for the bulbs so don't remove the foliage until it has completely yellowed and withered.
- **Prune roses early in April if you haven't already done so.** The best time to prune roses is when the leaf buds have begun to swell, but before they have grown to 1/4 inch long. If you don't want to take a ruler out to the garden, let forsythia bushes tell you when the time is right. When they are in full bloom, it's time. While there are specific rules for pruning different types of roses, there are some general guidelines for pruning all roses:
 - ✓ First, use clean, sharp pruners.
 - ✓ Make cuts at a 45-degree angle just above (1/4") an outward-facing bud. Seal the ends of cuts with white glue to prevent cane borers.
 - ✓ Remove all dead, broken or damaged canes. Dead canes will appear dark brown or black or will be shriveled. Also remove canes that are smaller in diameter than a pencil.
 - ✓ Take a look at the overall shape of the rose. Remove canes that are growing in the wrong direction or those that are crossing through the middle of the plant. This will allow more light and air to reach through.
- Prune forsythia and other spring-flowering shrubs when they have finished blooming.
- Prune back butterfly bushes hard once you see new growth.

In the vegetable garden:

- **Continue planting cool-season vegetables.** Lettuce, spinach, broccoli, cabbage, beets, carrots and peas relish cooler temperatures. Do not get impatient and plant warm-season vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, green beans, and eggplant. These can't get planted outside until the middle of May.
- Plant strawberries, asparagus and rhubarb.

In containers:

- **Plant spring containers.** Don't wait for geraniums and sweet potato vines to add color to your front door or patio. There are plenty of flowering plants that enjoy the cooler temperatures of spring including pansies, alyssum, stocks, snapdragons, and lots more.
- **Use cool-season vegetables in spring containers.** Swiss chard and lettuce are beautiful in spring containers mixed with pansies and other cool-season annuals.

In the water garden:

- **Remove deicers and get pumps and filters going again.** Clean out the muck from the bottom of the pond.
- Even if fish appear hungry, don't begin feeding them until the water temperature is at least 50 degrees.

Wildlife:

- Empty and clean birdhouses and nesting boxes.
- **Welcome hummingbirds back to your garden.** They return to this area the first part of April and will be hungry from their long migration. Get those feeders out early to provide nourishment for those weary travelers, and they just might move in for the summer.

Gardening indoors:

- **Start hardening off tomato and pepper seedlings when the weather permits.** Move them outside in a sunny spot sheltered from strong winds during the warmest part of the day for short periods at first. Gradually lengthen the amount of time they're outside so they'll be ready to be planted after the danger of frost has passed.
- Plant canna and dahlia tubers in pots indoors to give them a head start.