

The Garden in April

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturalist

Spring has sprung and boy is it glorious! I always have this internal sense of euphoria, as though this is the first spring I've ever experienced, and then it all bubbles out and I find myself saying things like "Oh my gosh! Look at how green the grass is!" or "Look at the sky! It's so blue!" It's as though I'm seeing it all for the first time, and yet this happens every year when the season turns. It's so hard not to get excited about the simplest things and I'm not embarrassed to admit that. These things are what make me smile and want to turn to my neighbor and say, "Do you see that? Isn't it marvelous?" Such is the beauty of spring and the charm of Mother Nature. Oh sure, it'll turn all grey and rainy at the drop of a hat. But even the rain has a gentleness to it this time of year, and I love that too!

In the ornamental garden:

- Pull weeds. I know. It feels like I'm always saying that, but hey. Weeds are a constant part of gardening and to expect a weed free garden is (I believe) unrealistic. However, we must do our best to be sure that they don't completely overrun us, or our gardens. I think my favorite tool for weeding is a Hori-Hori knife. If you are not a proud owner of one, I highly recommend you buy one.
- If you haven't pruned your roses and fruit trees, time is of the essence. If you wait too long with your roses, they will bloom later than usual and you'll be wondering why everyone else has roses and you don't.
- Fertilize roses if you haven't already.
- Early spring is a good time to spread mulch. Whatever material you choose to use, it will help you immensely when it comes to weed control and will help to retain moisture in the soil, reducing your need to water during the driest months.
- Once the flowers have faded from your daffodils, you can remove the flower but leave the foliage until it dies back. You'll be really tempted to cut them back to the ground because, honestly, they don't look so pretty. But by leaving the foliage, the bulb is fed (via photosynthesis) and a new flower is formed in the bulb for the next year. Some people like to fertilize their bulbs at this time with bone meal, and that is entirely up to you. I've had excellent success without it.
- Plant dahlia tubers and lily bulbs. Usually by now the soil has warmed and dried out enough so they don't just sit there and rot. If your soil is still super soggy, wait a bit longer or consider planting in pots.
- By the end of the month, it should be safe to directly sow sunflowers.
- Put out slugbait! All this tender juicy new growth is very tempting to slugs and snails.

- Stop by the Nursery and stroll the aisles. We've got so many new and fresh plants right now that you'd probably be wise to pack a lunch and plan on spending some serious time.
- Earth Day is April 22 and Arbor Day is April 26. Plant something special in their honor!

In the edible garden:

- Remove old unproductive raspberry canes. By now they've pushed growth and it's easy to tell which ones are dead and which are still productive.
- Prune out the oldest wood on blueberries, currants, and gooseberries. This makes way for fresh, new productive wood.
- It should be safe to sow all kinds of veggie seeds directly out in the garden: carrots, cilantro, radishes, broccoli, beets, spinach, kale, swill chard, peas...shall I go on?
- Sow tomatoes and peppers and other warm season veggies indoors. These can be planted out later, usually after Mother's Day in May.
- It's also a great time to sow edible flowers like nasturtiums, calendula, and borage. Borage, by the way, is very attractive to many beneficial insects, including many types of bees, which are a very good thing to have in the garden.
- Have I mentioned slugbait? There's nothing more infuriating than stepping out one morning to find that your pea seedlings have been devoured overnight by slugs and/or snails. There's usually nothing left but a shimmery trail of slime and an empty seed row.
- Peek around the asparagus bed. Are they up yet?
- Fertilize garlic. Side-dress with an organic, slow release fertilizer.
- Enjoy the anticipation that comes with waiting for seeds to germinate and the excitement when they finally have.

Take a few moments (at least!) to enjoy the return of the song birds, the smell of freshly cut grass, the longer days, the warmer temperatures, the frog song in the evenings, the push of new growth in your garden and beyond. You know. Spring!



About the author:

Rachel has been gardening since childhood, thanks to her mom, and has been part of the team at Christianson's since 2002. She's a Certified Professional Horticulturist with a passion for roses and vegetable gardening. Rachel and her family enjoy gardening together and now share their urban garden with a menagerie of ducks, chickens, two cats, and a dog.

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