

WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH: APRIL



The days grow longer and warmer now making this a busy month for plants and gardeners alike.

Traditionally April brings showers but watch out for dry, windy spells and frosty nights. The best April days are those bringing warm rain from the west, or the occasional southerly winds with the promise of summer to come. Despite the unpredictable weather, many of the most colourful flowers are in bloom, with bulbs showing their finest display and fruit trees covered in blossom.

TASK LIST

☒ Remove all faded flowers from your daffodils, primroses, pansies & violas in your borders. Let your daffodils die back naturally so they put energy back into the bulbs and next year your daffodils will produce a better display. Large clumps of snowdrops can be divided and re-planted ready for next spring.

☒ Prune back forsythia once it has finished flowering. You can also prune & trim spiraea, buddleia, dogwoods (Cornus), hardy fuchsias, cotoneasters, potentilla, mahonia, ribes (flowering currant) and winter flowering jasmine. Complete pruning of roses and feed them with rose fertilizer by hoeing it into the surface soil.

☒ This month plant biennials such as digitalis, pansies and violas, Brompton stocks and sweet Williams, sweet pea seedlings, dahlia tubers and sow seeds of annuals. In the coming months, plant groups of gladioli bulbs at intervals to extend their flowering season. Grow lilies in pots so that they can be moved into the garden to fill any gaps. NOTE! Most pot grown plants, trees, shrubs can be planted at just about anytime of the year. Although spring and autumn are really the best times to plant. If you see something you like then buy it and plant it now. Buy a plant with an information tab and follow the instructions carefully.

☒ Weed control is important this month. Hand dig out weeds from your borders before they get out of control then you will only need to hoe occasionally throughout the season. To suppress weeds add a mulch to your borders or better still plant lots of ground cover plants such as bugle (ajuga), hardy geraniums, hostas, tiarella, pachysandra, pulmonaria and lamb's ear (stachys).

☒ Stake tall-growing and straggly plants such as delphiniums, lupins, foxgloves, peonies, acanthus and oriental poppies to prevent them being damaged or blown down by windy weather.

☒ There are masses of vegetables that can be planted now - shallots, garlic and onion sets, Jerusalem artichoke and horseradish tubers and asparagus crowns. Broad beans grown in pots can now be transplanted into the garden. Sow a seedbed of brassicas to provide transplants of sprouting broccoli, cauliflower and cabbages that will be ready for planting out to their final position in June or July for harvesting in autumn/winter.

☒ Sweet and hot peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, celery, salads and courgette seeds can all be sown in a frost-free greenhouse. Courgettes and celery can be transplanted outside later in the spring. Tomatoes germinate best at 22°C (72°F), and can either remain in the greenhouse or go outside from early summer onwards. Pot up tomato seedlings when they develop true leaves above the more rounded seed leaves. After growing on in small pots, they can be planted into larger pots or growing-bags. Peppers, cucumbers and aubergines do best kept under cover throughout their life.

☒ Keep spring pots looking good - a little attention will ensure they look their best right through until the end of May when summer bedding can be put out. Pick off dead flower-heads from primulas and winter-flowering pansies to encourage plants to

develop further flowers. Compost in pots can also dry out, so check with a finger to see how moist it is, and water well if it has dried out.

☒ Give lawns a make-over - months of wet weather will have caused moss to become a problem in many lawns. Thick moss quickly smothers out grass, so action is needed this spring to remove it, boost grass growth and improve surface drainage across the lawn. Chemical moss killers can be used to destroy existing moss which can subsequently be raked out. Afterwards, fork over the whole area to improve surface drainage. Increase frequency of mowing as growth dictates. Later, in April or early May, apply fertiliser and check regularly for weeds, digging out any that you find or applying a selective weedkiller.

☒ Watch out for slugs and snails - they are particularly partial to young, fresh growth! Trap them under tiles or grapefruit skins and dispose of them daily. Sprinkling a layer of sand, grit or crushed eggshells around plants may help. Alternatively, sparingly scatter slug pellets around plants most at risk but never leave pellets in piles.

OUR PLANTS OF THE MONTH

It's the small garden plants which attract attention this month, when rockery plants are at their prettiest! These include alyssum, arabis, aubrieta, bergenia, fritillaria, gentiana, lily-of-the-valley (convallaria), pulsatilla, saxifrage and wallflowers (cheiranthus). Trees and shrubs include amelanchier, Aucuba, Berberis, broom (Cytisus) camellia, forsythia, magnolias, crab apple (malus), ornamental cherries (prunus), rhododendrons and azaleas, flowering currant (ribes) and spireas.

DIANA'S CHOICE

If you're looking for hardy, no-care, "Plant and Forget" spring flowering bulbs, look no further - load up on Grape hyacinths. These bulbs are so winter hardy and easy to grow that no garden should be without them. Grape hyacinths are a group of plants in the genus Muscari of plants native to Eurasia that produce spikes of blue flowers resembling bunches of grapes. There are about forty species. They are planted as bulbs and tend to multiply quickly when planted in good soils. An additional benefit is that all Grape hyacinths have a lovely fragrance. The more you plant, the more fragrance you get.

