



HOME & GARDEN

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April 2009

Herbaceous Ornamental Plant Tips

Culture

ANNUALS AND PERENNIALS - Early to mid April is the latest time that all types of annuals can be started indoors under cool, white fluorescent lights. Most annuals and vegetables need a five week head start before planting outside. A few flowers like begonia, sweet peas, geraniums, and impatiens should be started 10-12 weeks before the last expected frost. You can also head start seedlings in cold frames outdoors.

- Butterfly weed, California poppies, gaillardia, cleome, bachelor's buttons, strawflowers, chamomile, alyssum, nigella, and annual phlox can be directly sown into the garden at this time.
- If you haven't already done so, now is the time to clean out flower beds and divide perennials. Cut down over-wintering ornamental grasses to within 2 inches of the ground. These plants are growing fast and its best to get the old debris out of the way. For best growth and flowering top-dress the beds with 1 inch of compost.

SPRING BULBS - Most types have fully emerged and are flowering at this time. Remove the spent flowers but leave bulb foliage alone until it dies back naturally. Now is a good time to apply a complete fertilizer (i.e. 10-10-10) to enhance leaf growth. Healthy leaves make for stronger and larger bulbs. Apply either a granular or liquid form. Follow label directions.

- Squirrels and rabbits are notorious for eating tulip buds and can be discouraged with commercially available repellents.

GROUNDCOVERS

- April is an ideal time to plant herbaceous groundcovers. Consider planting groundcovers where grass won't grow, where you have heavy shade or tree root problems and on steep slopes where it's not safe to mow grass. Select plants based on the amount of sun they require. Good choices for partial to full shade include periwinkle, liriopse, epimedium, sweet woodruff and pachysandra (Japanese and native). Groundcovers are also useful as a border around buildings, garden beds and groupings of trees. However, do not plant rapidly spreading types (i.e. English ivy, pachysandra) near property lines or woodlands where they can become invasive.

VINES

- For a little extra interest and dimension to your landscape, plant annual vines like cardinal climber, hyacinth bean, morning glory, etc. to cover fences, gazebos and trellises. All are easy to grow, have very colorful flowers and are easy to clean up in the fall because they are killed by the cold. You can head start them indoors about three weeks before the last frost date for your area or sow their seeds directly in the soil after the frost date. (See frost date chart.)
- The clematis is a very beautiful perennial flowering vine. There are several varieties to select. Clematis usually has a lot of winter killed stems. Prune the dead wood out now before too much the new growth has fully emerged.

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WATER GARDENING

- Excessive algae growth is a very common problem in many backyard ponds. To reduce algae problems in your pond it's important to clean out dead leaves and other organic debris. Do this as soon as possible as not to disturb the breeding and egg laying of toads, frogs and salamanders. If breeding has already started, very carefully remove leaves and debris with a large hole net (i.e. fishing net). If you can't do this, wait until breeding is finished before removing debris.
- A filter can help reduce algae growth by absorbing the excess nutrients that feed algae. A pond filtration system is composed of a mechanical part that catches larger pieces of debris (foam filter pads) and a biological portion (i.e. gravel, lava rock) that removes excessive nutrients. Another effective way to reduce algae problems is by covering 40%-60% of the pond surface with water lily pads. The water lily pads (leaves) shade the water thus reducing the amount of sunlight penetrating the water. Less light means less algae.
- April is a good time to divide water lilies and other aquatic plants that have become overcrowded. Lift the plants from their containers and using a large knife or a sharp spade cut the rhizomes into two or more pieces. Replant and add a fertilizer tablet.
- Fountains, statuary and filters can be placed back into ponds at this time. See HG17 for details on aquatic plants.

POISONOUS AND INVASIVE PLANTS

- You can weaken and kill poison ivy (see #HG34) and other invasive plants, like Japanese honeysuckle, by cutting them to the ground now and throughout the growing season. Do not handle the hairy poison ivy vines wrapped around trees. Sever them at ground level and paint the cut end with Brush-B-Gone or a glyphosate product. The best time for control is in the fall.

Have a pest or gardening question?
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800-342-2507
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