



Trowel Talk!

April, 2012

April in the Garden

How can a home gardener know when to start digging? Each year it seems, just when we think that winter is over, it snows again. Can we rely on calendar months as a guide to gardening? Should we start digging in April?

Although there are no hard and fast rules because Ottawa spring weather is so unpredictable, there are some gardening activities that should be planned for April. One of these is transplanting deciduous trees and shrubs. As a rule of thumb, it is best to do so once the soil has thawed but before the buds burst. Woody plants at this stage are still in winter dormancy and April, with its typical rain showers and sometimes snow fall, is the month that offers the best chance of success because new transplants require plenty of soil moisture until root systems are well established. In fact, some trees and shrubs such as magnolia (*Magnolia* spp.) and holly (*Ilex* spp.) have a very short window of opportunity for transplant, usually April.

As well, herbaceous perennials and biennials do best when divided or transplanted in April, the earlier the better, weather permitting. Irises and peonies are the exception and should not be divided or moved until August.

Evergreens can also be trans-

planted in April but benefit from warmer soil temperatures when moved later on, in May.



Photos: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Two bergenias in early season: The species form of *B. cordifolia* (top photo) and a named cultivar, *B. cordifolia* 'Rosi Ruffles' (lower photo) showing new growth and flower bud (photo taken April 4, 2012)

During the unseasonably warm weather in March this year, a walk around your garden would have revealed many emerging perennials. Early growth is typical of most early bloomers such as bergenia (*Bergenia cordifolia*) and cushion spurge (*Euphorbia polychroma*). The below freezing temperatures and occasional snowflakes that followed will not have harmed these plants. Some perennials however are damaged by late spring frosts. One of these is the hardy chrysanthemum commonly known as garden mum (*Dendranthema x morifolium*). Herbaceous plants such as these have shallow roots that heave out of the soil with spring thaws. Several other plants that used to be classified as chrysanthemums behave the same way. So when you see garden mums, painted daisies (*Tanacetum coccineum*) or shasta daisies (*Leucanthemum x*

superbum) with their roots exposed in the spring, to protect them, push the roots back into the soft soil and firm them up.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Leucanthemum (shasta daisy) is a very early starter (photo taken April 4, 2012)

After April 15th, check for red lily beetles on the soil surface where your lilies grow. The adult beetles overwinter in the soil and emerge on the first really hot day in spring. At that time, because plants have not leafed out yet, the beetles are very visible against the soil. They are moving quite groggily and are easy to capture and destroy. Left unchecked, these destructive beetles multiply quickly and they can decimate a lily patch in no time.

This is also the month to clean up the garden beds. Remove any dead foliage and stems and add to the compost pile. If a plant is not greening-up do not assume that it is dead. Many perennials show no signs of life in April. For example, because of our very cold winters, most ornamental grasses, whether cool-season or warm-season species will stay dormant until soil temperatures warm up, usually in May.

And remember, as you go about these tasks in April, try to avoid walking on the lawn unnecessarily until it can carry your weight without your shoes sinking in.

Flurette Huneault
Retired Master Gardener

Trowel Talk!

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- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
- trowel_talk_editor@rogers.com



Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)
- Wednesday 7-8 pm (April -September)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

Rare & Unusual Plant Sale: Sunday, May 13, 9am-1pm,
Tropical Greenhouses on Maple Street, parking lot, Central Experimental Farm

Red Trillium Studio & Garden Tour, May 12-13, 10am-5pm

MGOC advice clinic & plant sale at 112 Terraview Drive, Kinburn.

Byward Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.)

Parkdale Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

Carp Market: Saturdays, May through June (8 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Renovating an Older Garden - April 16, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Brockville Wesleyan Church, 33 Central Avenue West, Brockville, Ontario
Hosted by the Brockville Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Thugs, Bullies & Sneaks - Plants to be Wary Of - April 17, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener
Pretty Street Community Centre, Stittsville, Ontario
Hosted by the Stittsville-Goulbourn Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Gardening with Little to Low Maintenance in Mind - April 19, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean, Ontario
Hosted by the Nepean Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Spring Garden Planner - April 21, 2012 - 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener
Glebe Community Centre, 175 Third Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
For information: 613-564-1058 COST: \$20

Vertical Gardens - Up & Down the Walls with Vines - April 23, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Cornerstone Community Church, 1728 concession 11, Almonte, Ontario
Hosted by the Almonte Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Container Gardening Workshop - April 28, 2012 - 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener
Glebe Community Centre, 175 Third Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
For information: 613-564-1058 www.ottawa.ca/recreationguide or drop in to any Client
Service Centre including the Glebe Community Centre COST: \$48.50

LECTURE SERIES: Presented jointly by Friends of the Farm & Master Gardeners

Tuesdays in April Non FoF Members - \$15 for one talk, \$50 for four talks
FoF Members - \$12 for one talk, \$40 for four talks

7:00 p.m. - Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa
Reservations: info@friendsofthefarm.ca OR (613-230-3276)

The Beauty of Annuals - April 17, 2012 - Diane McClymont Peace

Creating a Winter Scene in your Yard - April 24, 2012 - Julianne Labreche



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

April TO DO List

- There is still time to start seeds, such as annual herbs, indoors. They are fast growing and will be a good size for setting out in 4-5 weeks time.
- Check for plants that may have lifted from the ground through 'frost heave'. Push them back in the ground or cover the exposed roots with more soil.
- Perennials can be easily divided at this time of year. After transplanting, water until the new plant is established.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

Some basic spring lawn care will set you up for a season of green and healthy lawn.

Top dress the whole lawn with light compost or rich soil but never put more than 1.5-2.5cm on healthy lawn areas. This is a good time to level the lawn or patch bare spots. These repair areas can take a thicker layer of soil but will need reseeding.

Sprinkle grass seed in areas where the lawn is thin and on any areas that were patched. Rake the grass seed lightly into the soil.

To increase biodiversity and overall lawn health, use a lawn seed mix that contains a mix of grass seeds and/or use a Dutch white clover seed. Clover is very drought tolerant and will remain green all summer.

Water seeded areas well and keep moist until the lawn is established.

Most lawn fertilizers today contain corn gluten meal (CGM) - a natural by-product from the corn syrup industry. A side 'benefit' of CGM is that it inhibits seed germination. This is a benefit when it stops weed seeds from germinating but is not so beneficial when you've just seeded your lawn. So it is important not to fertilize newly seeded areas until the seeds have germinated and established.

If you are not seeding your lawn, then the application of fertilizer containing

CGM should start early in the season. A simple guideline is to apply the first application of CGM when the *Forsythia* is in bloom (a shrub with yellow flowers, often blooming in mid-April). CGM remains effective for

about 6-8 weeks. Regular applications will stop the weed seeds (such as annual crabgrass) from establishing. Any existing perennial weeds will need to be removed manually.