

April in the Tallahassee Garden



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Now is a good time to add plants, like this firebush, that will attract butterflies and other wildlife.

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We've had some beautiful weather recently. Take advantage of it by working in the garden. There is a lot that can be done now.

Caladiums can be planted this month once the soil temperature reaches 70 degrees. If you are not sure how warm your soil is, just plant the caladiums and they will grow when the soil is the right temperature. Gladiolas are another easy bulb to grow. If you like to buy cut flowers in summer, plant these and cut them for your table when they bloom. You can plant them every two weeks or so for a continuous supply of flowers.

Another flower that is excellent for cutting is the common zinnia. Get a large flowered kind like California Giant mix for a bold splashy look or choose a sturdy type with clear colors and more resistance to mildew such as Oklahoma Mix. Add seeds of celosia, gomphrena, orange and yellow cosmos, and marigolds, to make an exciting cutting garden. A steady supply of fertilizer and water, as well as lots of sunlight, will produce the best looking flowers. Don't forget to continue deadheading those winter annuals such as pansies, petunias, and dianthus to keep them blooming.

It is not too late to plant fruit-bearing, warm season vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash and cucumbers. Don't forget the peas and beans - green beans, edamame soy beans, lima beans and southern peas. To round things out plant a little corn, sweet potatoes, okra, turnips and kohlrabi. For dessert, grow cantaloupe and watermelon. To add zest to all these vegetables plant basil, chives, dill, mint and lemon balm. When your parsley, cilantro and fennel begin to go to seed, the flower stalks look great in bouquets of zinnias and gladiolas. This time of year expect to do lots of watering and weeding. In return for all your work you will have some fresh, delicious meals.

Prune spring-flowering shrubs and trees after they finish blooming. Some azaleas can be done now, as can spring-blooming spireas. Camellias tend to have lots of suckers at their base. Cut suckers as well as diseased and damaged wood out first. Then prune crossing branches. It is best to thin the plant by cutting back to another branch/stem or to the ground rather than to do heading cuts as you would for hedge plants such as boxwood and privet.

If you like the look of your lawn there is no need to fertilize. The majority of homeowners do not fertilize their lawns, especially those who have centipede grass. However if you want to encourage your lawn a little, use a 15-0-15 analysis with half of the nitrogen, 7.5 percent, in a slow release form. Water the fertilizer in just a little so it won't blow away in the wind or wash away in a downpour.

What is a garden without the drama of wildlife? Watching the butterflies, frogs, lizards, birds and small animals adds another dimension to the whole experience of gardening and outdoor life. With certain carefully selected additions you can add to the beauty of your yard and attract wildlife at the same time. Bird baths provide a source of water for all to enjoy. Fruit-bearing shrubs and trees are best planted in fall or winter, but many annuals and perennials can be planted now to provide nectar and larval food for moths, butterflies and hummingbirds. Some of these include cardinal guard, coneflower, coreopsis, fennel, firebush, goldenrod, impatiens, jacobinia, lantana, milkweed, parsley, pentas, plumbago, porterweed, rudbeckia, salvia, shrimp plant, stokes aster, sunflower, and zinnia.

Today is the most beautiful day. Breathe the fresh air; feel the warm sun; dig in the dirt!

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