



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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April Landscape Activities

by Peter Warren, Extension Agent

Spring has sprung although you might be wondering this weekend. Even though March and April throw in some cold days to remind us not to plant our tender plants too early it is hard not to think about it. This is a good time to plant trees and shrubs so why not take a stroll through a nursery or two to see what is available. Also look for some growers at your local farmer's market. Here are some other things to consider for your landscape this month.

When purchasing bedding annuals this spring, choose properly grown plants with good color. Buy plants with well-developed root systems that are vigorous, but not too large for their pots. Do not select under-developed plants with shallow, poorly grown root systems that cannot absorb the moisture held in deeper soil and are more subject to damage from the rapid changes in temperature and moisture level typical of the soil surface. Go ahead and take them out of their containers so you can get a peek before you buy.

Observe your daffodil and other spring bulbs while in bloom this spring to be sure they have not been shaded by the new growth of tree or shrub plantings. If they have, you may need to move your bulbs to a new, sunny location or prune back the plantings. Do this after they bloom while the leaves are still green so you can find them easily.

Plants bought from greenhouses need to be hardened off (acclimated to the reduced humidity and cooler temperatures of the outdoors) before being planted in the landscape. Place newly purchased plants outside during the day, but bring in at night to protect from early season, cool, night temperatures that may injure or kill the plants. Gradually, the plants can be left outside for longer periods of time until they have fully acclimated and can be planted.

Lift, divide, and replant chrysanthemums as soon as new shoots appear. Each rooted shoot or clump will develop into a fine plant for late summer bloom. Pinch out the top when the plants are about 4 inches high to thicken the plant.

Plan to attract hummingbirds to your garden this year by planting red or orange flowers. Monarda (bee balm) is a good perennial to provide nectar for these small birds.

When you are out shopping for annual flowers for your garden, look for plants with lots of unopened buds. Plants that bloom in the pack are often root bound and can be set back for several weeks after being transplanted. Plants not yet in bloom will actually bloom sooner, be better established and grow faster.

Plant dahlia tubers as soon as the danger of frost is passed. Stake them at the time of planting to avoid injury to tubers. To ensure the dahlia tubers you plant have survived storage, sprout them indoors in a warm, lit spot.

To extend the blooming period of gladiolus, plant early, mid- and late-season selections each week until the middle of June. Choose a sunny location and plant the corms four to six inches deep and six to eight inches apart.

Scatter annual poppy seeds in flower borders. The fine seeds need no covering. The plants grow rapidly and provide colorful flowers in early summer.

In a sunny location with poor soil, plant nasturtiums for a colorful show. They require warm soil to sprout and start blooming in about 50 days. Too much water and fertilizer produce excess leaves and few flowers.

Many popular perennials can be divided now including phlox, fall asters, shasta daisies, baby's breath, and liriopse. Set up a plant exchange with friends and neighbors to share the excess.

Planted now, Sedum spectabile and Hosta tardifolia or H. plantaginea will brighten your flowerbed in the fall with flowers. Aster novae-angliae, which is a blue aster, or the red chrysanthemum cultivar 'Minn Ruby' are also late blooming.

When iris leaves appear thin and limp, check for borers. These grub-like insects can ruin an entire planting if not detected and eradicated early.

For more information about landscape topics contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office.

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