

APRIL GARDENING TIPS

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April is one of the busiest months at Seven Oaks, and for most gardeners in gardening zones 6-7, April and May are the primary months to start a vegetable garden, plant annuals and enjoy the garden before the hot weather sets in. By April 1, we make sure that all of the raised beds in the vegetable garden are ready. Beds that have to be redone because the wood has rotted away are removed, with new beds constructed and in place. Compost and mulch arrive, and we spend many evenings throughout April and May simply hauling both around the farm and placing them in the orchard, vegetable and flower gardens. By the end of May, I'll be grateful for the hot weather, when my primary chores are watering and mowing the lawn.

If you live in Gardening Zones 6 or 7, the following tips may be helpful to get your garden growing this April. Gardeners in other zones should adjust their timeline up or down accordingly, with lower zones 5 and 4 waiting a month or so, and zones 8 and 9 ahead of us by about a month.

April Gardening Tips

- Start cucumber, squash and melon seeds in peat pots indoors if you plan to start these crops from seed. Peat pots minimize transplanting shock for these crops, and starting them indoors gives them a nice head start. I'm trying to get mine into the garden before the cucumber beetles begin mating in late May - June; once they begin laying eggs, my squash and melon crops are limited as they lay their eggs on the leaves, and the young devour the plants in a night.
- Plant potatoes.
- Plant leeks, onions and garlic.
- Order sweet potato plants, but keep them indoors if they arrived before your frost free date. They need plenty of warmth and cannot survive a frost, so wait to plant them in the garden.
- Plant seeds for lettuce, radishes, spinach, chard, and all cool weather greens now. Go easy planting lettuce and radish. Spread out your planting into small groups every two weeks so you get a constant harvest in rather than one gigantic harvest. There's only so much lettuce or radishes a family can eat in a week!
- Plant cool weather root crops now: beets and turnips. "Detroit Dark Red" beets are a favorite here and can very well, but Golden are a lovely addition to the dinner table, too.
- Many stores put seeds on sale now, so visit your favorite retailer to stock up on vegetable garden seeds.
- Uncover the strawberries patch if you used pine straw mulch to protect it from frost. Weeds and fertilizer.
- Spray fruit trees according to the label directions - green tip, bud, flower open, petal drop, etc.

- Weeding starts now. Get a jump on your weeds. Use plenty of mulch after weeding to suppress weed seed growth and maintain moisture levels.
- Place hoops for peonies now when they start growing. Hoops help hold them upright when the flowers open. The heavy flowers can bend to the ground under April's rains
- Plant pansies outdoors now - they can tolerate a light frost, and really brighten the garden!
- Enjoy daffodils and tulips now. If you like to cut these flowers for indoor bouquets, don't mix daffodils and tulips in the same vase. Daffodils exude a chemical in their sap which greatly shortens the lifespan of other cut flowers. Just enjoy separate bouquets - all daffodils in one vase, all tulips or other flowers in another. Wash the vase used for the daffodils with hot, soapy water before putting it away.
- Be prepared for sudden frosts. If a frost is threatened, always use CLOTH or newspaper to cover plants, never plastic. You do not have to cover cool-weather flowers such as pansies, daffodils and tulips. Most cool weather veggies such as lettuce and radishes can tolerate a light frost, but check with your local Cooperative Extension office about other vegetables if you aren't sure.



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