

# *Gardening Almanac for the Plateau*

## April

### **Weather** Average Temperatures and Rainfall:

Although all of the spring months will ordinarily continue to have good rains, they will begin to lessen. The average rainfall for April is 5.1 inches while the month's temperatures will reach an average maximum of 65 degrees F. and a minimum of 43 degrees F.

**Activities:** This is an excellent time to dig up samples of your soil and submit them to the Agricultural Extension Agency for testing. Before beginning this project, stop by and pick up their special instructions. Soils in the Plateau area may be highly acidic in some areas necessitating adding some lime or other additives to your lawns and gardens.

Apply a combination of slow-release fertilizer and pre-emergent herbicide for crabgrass control to your cool-season (fescue) lawn before the last frost. For best results, apply before dandelions reach the puffball stage. Repair bare spots in cool season lawns by raking the dirt and spreading new seeds. Use of a straw cover is always helpful. Spring mowing will begin with an opportunity to put grass clippings in your compost. If you have determined that your soil is more acid than the cool season grasses will tolerate, this is the time to put moderate amounts of lime on your lawn. Apply fertilizer to warm season grasses such as Zoysia or Bermuda grass by April 15<sup>th</sup>. Use 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

Start seeds indoors for annuals and some perennials. Lettuces can be directly sown into containers and grow quickly. Just cover seeds with a dusting of soil, or you can pat the seeds down without covering them at all. Once the lettuce is 4 to 5 inches high, hold the leaves in one hand and use scissors to cut the stems about an inch from its base.

Clean flowerbeds and put down weed preventer, being very careful to note the instructions on the package. Although frost still may occur during the month of April, perennials may be set out. A good general fertilizer such as 10-10-10 is good at this time for flowerbeds. Perennials will begin to grow quickly now. Both azaleas and rhododendrons will show up for sale at this time. Buy azaleas in bloom to make sure the color is what you desire. Also make sure the soil you plant them in is of sufficient acidity. Both plants grow best in part shade.

Continue to put our winter hardy seedlings. Be sure to loosen the roots of new seedlings and press into carefully loosened natural soil so that the new plants will develop a strong root system. Water transplants regularly. Plant warm season veggies like tomatoes, peppers and corn after April 15<sup>th</sup>. Planting "high sugar" or sugar sweet corn varieties should be delayed until May 1<sup>st</sup>, because the seeds do not germinate in cold garden soils.

Begin planning the herbs you would like to plant. Many local stores will have sold out by May, so you may want to buy early if you have an appropriate place to keep them warm and moist with room to spread. Begin choosing permanent locations for perennial herbs such as chives, oregano, mint (all flavors, and some are very invasive), fennel,

horseradish, lemon balm, parsley, sage, thyme and tarragon. Rosemary and bay leaf will winter over in this area, but may be kept in sheltered areas to guard against winter ice storms.

This is an excellent time to begin the process of dividing hostas, hardy mums and day lilies. Iris can be dug and spread, but may not bloom the first year after division.

Turn compost and ready it for new green material. It's a good time to get a second bin started. As you prepare your flowerbeds for planting, use well-rotted manure, processed manure, peat moss or compost, as they are good additives for building compost humus in the soil. It is not recommended to plant annuals until after May 15, the average last frost-free date. And speaking of compost, have you ever considered creating a worm farm? Any kind of box that's 1 foot tall and 1 by 2 feet will do. Drill holes in the top, sides and bottom to provide air circulation and drainage. Look for red worms in a manure pile or under leaves in the woods, or you can buy red wigglers. The worms need good bedding of dampened, torn or shredded paper, newspaper, cardboard, brown leaves, straw, peat moss, sawdust and hay. They will eventually eat their bedding, since they eat half their weight in food every day, so start with a cup of food every other day. This food can be scraps of vegetation but not any dairy, fats or meat. These worms will process about 3 pounds of garbage a week, providing you with worm fertilizer you can harvest every 2 or 3 months.

The hummingbirds are ready to arrive, so prepare their solution (1 part sugar to 4 parts boiling water....stir until sugar is completely dissolved, and cool before pouring into feeder). DO NOT add food coloring. The red on the feeder is all they need.

Prune summer-flowering shrubs like crepe myrtle after the last extremely cold weather, but before they leaf out significantly. Prune spring-flowering shrubs like forsythia, weigela, Japanese quince and lilac within two to three weeks after the last petals have dropped. Prune these shrubs at the base (no more than a third of the oldest growth) near the ground to help rejuvenate their growth and keep their flowering heavy.

Plant tender bulbs and tubers (gladiola, lilies and dahlias). Plant additional gladiola bulbs every two weeks until mid-June to ensure a continuous source of blooms. Dahlias can be planted in a sunny location and in good rich, soft soil, as soon as the soil warms up. Lilies can be planted in early spring and as soon as possible after purchasing from a garden center. They can tolerate any early spring frosts safely underground. They like soft soil, full sun, and don't let them dry out and shrivel up.

Fertilize spring-blooming bulbs just after blooming. Use a complete fertilizer, such as 5-10-10 at a rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet. If you noticed smaller blooms on your bulbs this spring, divide crowded planting as blooming finishes (especially daffodils).

If you notice borers on your iris, control it by using Dimethoate (Cygon 2E) when new growth is 6-9 inches in height, then as often as needed.

Stake clematis and any other vines that could use the added support as new growth emerges and they begin to flower.

Clean your pond or water feature and remove winter debris. Cut back and remove all dead plant debris from your potted aquatic plants. Begin feeding fish around mid-April.

Conifers, broadleaf and narrow-leaf evergreens may be pruned anytime the wood is not frozen, but do not prune back to old wood on the conifers. The best time to prune evergreens is late winter or early spring before too much new growth starts.

If you want groundcovers, good ones for this area are: Allegheny spurge, Alumroot, Foamflower, Partridge berry, Pussytoes, Teaberry, Wild ginger and Sundrops, the latter

for shade, and the others for filtered shade. Other ground covers for shade are Creeping phlox, Verbena, Dwarf crested iris and Wild blue phlox.

**Wildlife** Hummingbirds begin returning around the 10th and will come back to specific places where they found food the year before. Male goldfinches begin to shed their winter drab, and dress up in fine gold. Chickadees and tufted titmice will begin to nest, and woodpeckers will begin their raucous calling and hammering.

**You may also see** Cardinals, Brown Thrashers, a few Robins, Rufus-sided Towhees, Pileated Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Nuthatches, Pine siskins, Mourning Doves, Crows, migrating Canada Geese, Ruby-throat Hummingbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, American Coot, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Indigo Buntings, Eastern Bluebirds, Chipping Sparrows, Starlings, Hairy Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Muscovy Ducks, Mallard Ducks, Carolina Wrens, Wild Turkeys, Blue Jays, Red tailed Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Purple Finch, American Coot, Mockingbirds, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler, Great Horned Owl, Grackle, Great Blue Heron, Scarlet Tanager, Gray Catbird, Tree Swallow, Killdeer, Brown Headed Cowbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Wood Ducks, Kingfishers, Dark-eyed Juncos, Song Sparrows, Yellow-shafted Flickers, Great Crested Flycatchers, Cedar Waxwings, and House Wrens.

**Plants** April blooms will include Violets, Bluets, Bleeding Hearts, Narcissus, Anemone, Periwinkle, Creeping Phlox, Candy Tuft, Azaleas, Wisteria, Pansies, Archangel ground cover, Ajuga ground cover, Lilies of the Valley, Lilacs, Pansies, Edelweiss, Wild Iris, late Tulips, Plum trees, Red Bud trees, Dogwood trees, Service Berry trees, Lady Slipper, and Violas. Cool weather vegetables are maturing nicely and green onions can be eaten.

***This information has been created by the Cumberland County Master Gardeners Association, Crossville TN***