

April in Your Garden

Spring has sprung! Time to do some serious planting, pruning, snail stomping. When your azaleas, camellias, and rhodies have finished blooming, carefully remove spent flowers, because the growth tips are right behind the blooms. Lightly prune to shape the shrub, clean up any dropped flowers, feed with an acid fertilizer, and add some mulch, keeping it at least an inch away from the trunk.

It's time to brighten up the garden with annuals. I buy 6-packs of impatiens, marigold, alyssum, zinnia, lobelia when they arrive in the nurseries. Then I transplant them into 4-inch pots and nurse them along until I have time to plant them. I usually plant one marigold plant near each tomato plant so I need them to be ready to transplant by May 1 when I plant tomatoes.

April is the time when I look closely at my perennials, to see which need dividing, which look too raggedy to continue, and which need severe pruning. I use Peter Pan Agapanthus as a border, so I divide them every three years by digging them out of their holes. Then I split them in quarters with a shovel, replant one quarter in the hole with added compost, pot up the other three in gallon containers, and give them away.

With our lack of rain, do not forget to increase your watering. Also, some plants like citrus, camellias, gardenias might turn chlorotic after a long winter. To control this iron deficiency, spray the foliage with a foliar fertilizer containing iron and zinc or apply chelated iron following label directions.

This is the month to start planning my summer vegetable garden. I plant seeds of green beans, carrots, beets, zucchini, cucumbers, sunflowers, not in the ground as dinner for snails and slugs, but in flats, close to the house. I nurse them along until May 1, switching them to 4-inch pots when 2 sets of real leaves appear. I love to shop for tomato seedlings by visiting my favorite location: Master Gardeners' Spring Garden Market, Saturday, April 13, 9 AM – 2 PM. at History San Jose, 1650 Senter Road, San Jose. They will have over 75 varieties of tomatoes and 100 varieties of peppers, plus other summer vegetables. (They will only take cash or checks.)

In the meantime, this month I finish using my winter vegetables and evict them from the wine barrels that will hold tomatoes in May. I dig out half of the soil in the barrels, put it in the city composting, and fill the tomato barrels with the compost I have been nurturing since last fall. I also mix in chicken manure. By May 1st, the barrels will be ready for tomatoes.

By the way, some composters who use plastic containers are being plagued by swarms of fruit flies. My suggestion is to balance out greens (nitrogen) and browns (carbon). Give the compost a good supply of shredded newspaper and dry leaves. Keep in mind that balancing green and brown means 3 parts of carbon or brown for every 1 part of nitrogen or green. Kitchen scraps, grass clippings, garden trimmings are all considered green or nitrogen. So you need **three times as much carbon**, or browns. And keep the mixture moist. Let me know if this correction to your compost eliminates flies.

Happy gardening. If you have questions, feel free to contact me - vickisullivan@comcast.net

