

My Yard – April Too early, too late?

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, plantnebraska.org

“Even the most beautiful weather will not allay the gardener’s notion (well-founded, actually) that he is somehow too late, too soon, or that he has too much stuff going on or not enough. For the garden is the stage on which the gardener exults and agonizes out every crest and chasm of the heart.” Henry Mitchell



It’s finally spring and the long wait for sunshine, warm temperatures and some faint signs of green has ended. For many of us, unfortunately, it can coincide with one of two feelings, and sometimes at the same time. Option one is to feel like we’re already behind on yardwork or, option two, the warmth can deceive us into early planting, blissfully forgetting the mid-May snows and frosts we’ve had in recent years. Here’s a few tips to get us off to an enthusiastic but realistic start:

- Wet soil is easily compacted, so it’s best to avoid walking or working in wet soils or lawns. Delaying is also better for overwintering beneficial insects, which may stay in place until temperatures are steadily above 50°. To enjoy early bulbs and other bloomers, though, you may need to rake away wet leaves.
- One option if you’re anxious to get plants but the weather isn’t ready for planting, is to place them in a wagon or cart and move them out in the sun when it’s warm and back inside for cold weather and winds. This will gradually “harden them off” for planting outside when the time is right.
- Existing perennial plants that are being moved or divided (ones already in the ground and acclimated) should transplant well in April. A few that are better transplanted in later months include: day lilies in September, Oriental poppies in July and iris in late July. New nursery perennials may be vulnerable to frost so plant them later or be prepared to cover them or bring them in as needed.
- For tender one season annual plants, keep in mind that mid-May is the average—average, not promised—frost-free time for planting. As far as buying plants, it’s tempting to buy plants in full bloom but ones without blossoms will actually bloom sooner and grow better as well.
- It’s always a good time to improve soil by adding organic compost. It can be added little by little with new plants or a whole bed at a time.
- Pruning is best not done during “leaf on” or “leaf off” but dead or problematic branches can be removed as needed. It’s a perfect time to cut woody ornamentals like willows and forsythia that may bloom indoors for you to enjoy. The closer to their actual bloom, the more likely they will bloom indoors.
- Any herbs or other plants that have gotten leggy indoors can be cut back dramatically to encourage new growth before they are moved outdoors.
- Last but certainly not least, plant a tree for Arbor Day. To quote Martin Luther, “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I’d still plant my apple tree.”

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