

My Yard – April

“I’ve got my plants, now what?”

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, plantnebraska.org

For nursery plants, the transition from a temperature-controlled greenhouse, to sitting on the back steps, to getting planted in the garden, can be a tough one. Here are some suggestions for making sure your plants survive the changes.



Hardening off

Your new plants have been growing in a warm, protected greenhouse. They are not accustomed to tough outside conditions like rain, sun, wind or dramatically changing temperatures. To help them transition to the landscape it’s helpful to “harden them off” by gradually introducing them to the outdoors.

After bringing your plants home, try to keep them in a location sheltered from winds or hot sun for the first week or so. If harsh weather is expected—storms, severe winds or temperatures below 40 degrees—bring them into a garage or shed. After a couple of days in a sheltered spot, start moving the plants into the conditions they will be growing in.

Planting

- **When to Plant.** Annual plants that live for one season only are very vulnerable to frost. For them, mid-May is the average “frost-free” time for planting. Perennial plants that are being moved or divided (ones already outdoors and “hardened off”) should transplant well in April. Perennials that were in a nursery may still be vulnerable to frost so you may want to plant them later or be prepared to cover them.
- **Prepare Your Soil.** In new or expanded beds, make sure that your soil is loose and rich in organic matter so roots can easily grow into it. Before planting, try to kill weeds and grasses and add compost or other organic materials to enrich it.
- **How to Plant.** Dig a hole wider than the root ball. Make sure the soil is loose and crumbly. Then fill soil back in loosely for good root growth; don’t step on it or pack it
- **How to Mulch.** One of the best ways to mulch is actually by spacing plants closely together, or mulch them with wood chips, straw or grass clippings. One of the ways people can accidentally kill plants is by applying too much mulch. Make sure it is only 2-3 inches thick and slightly away from the base or crown of the plant to discourage rotting.
- **How to Water.** Water your plants well. Remember, your plants are in very small containers where water is quickly drained or absorbed. Even after they are planted their root systems are still very small. If the weather is hot or windy, you may have to water every day. Gradually you can limit watering to every few days and extend it as rainfall, temperatures and plant health allow.
- **Marking.** If individual plants are being planted in different places in your yard, it may be helpful to flag or otherwise mark them so you remember to water them. It will also help you remember where they were planted the following spring when they may still be smaller than other plants.

How NOT to Kill Your Plants (we’ve all done it!)

- **Overwatering.** Many plants are killed from too much water.
- **Not Getting to Your Project.** It happens to all of us. We have great intentions for the yard we’ve always wanted. Then life happens and months later our new plants are still sitting in their pots—if they’re still alive. If that’s a concern, you can plant them in a group for easy care until you get them moved to the desired location.
- **Weeds.** Weeds happen, and not controlling them can create long-term management problems. Take a walk around your yard several times a week. As you walk, pull any weeds you see in newly planted areas.

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