

Garden Club Horticultural Hints April 2023

Got your trowel ready?



Now's the time to fertilize all your bulbs. A sprinkling of all-purpose organic fertilizer around bulb foliage now will help them build strength for the future. And, never cut down the foliage (or braid it) before it has yellowed, or you are prematurely removing the food source that builds next year's flowers.

Ready your vegetable garden for spring! Repair any fence issues caused by winter damage. If you haven't already done so, order seeds by phone or computer. If they are sold out of what you want, they can offer alternatives. Lay out your vegetable beds on paper to save time when the soil is ready to plant. This month, you can plant your 'cold weather' crops, including spinach, peas and beets.

Your bulbs' blooms in 2023 are a product of the energy put into the bulb last year. Lightly fertilizing bulbs now – coupled with leaving up bulb foliage until it yellows – will ensure a great display in 2024.



Resist the temptation to apply mulch now. Applied too early (and April is too early in Massachusetts), the mulch will slow down your garden by acting as a blanket, preventing warming and keeping the soil colder than the air. Later on, those 2 to 3 inches of mulch will keep down weeds and dress your garden.



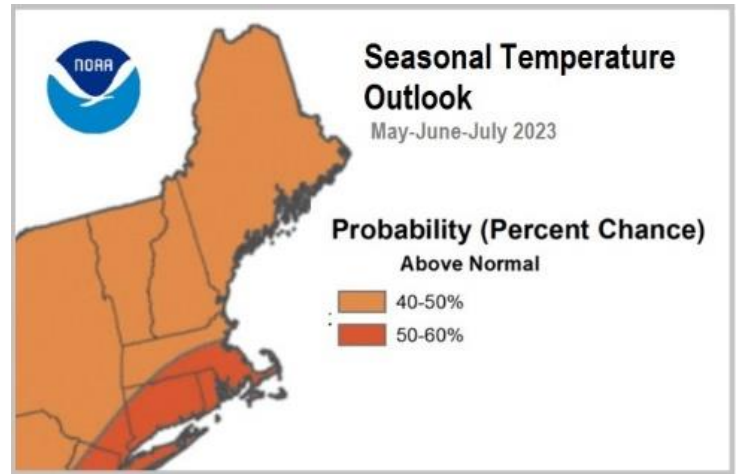
We are starting the 2023 gardening season in good shape. The UMASS Agricultural Extension Service reports excellent soil moisture at the end of March, and the Drought Monitor shows no area of New England in any stage of drought. Such conditions, though, can be fleeting: the National Weather Service's 90-day outlook is for above average temperatures.



Is it still too cold to garden, or does bad weather have you stuck inside? Watch the videos offered by Grow Native Massachusetts. Each year they bring in experts on a variety of environmental and horticultural topics. These lectures are available (free!) on their website. Learn in the comfort of your home. And you can always order their books online if you are hungry for more birds or mammals.



Photo credit: University of Maryland Extension Service



Spray dormant oil now to control aphids and other insects on your trees and shrubs. Commercial dormant oil sprays have an emulsifier added to allow the oil to mix with water. Spraying trees and shrubs now, before buds break and leaves appear, will kill eggs and insects while not affecting foliage or harming birds or mammals.



Some aphid species inject a toxin into plants, which causes leaves to curl and further distorts growth. A few species cause gall formations. Aphids may transmit viruses from plant to plant on certain vegetable and ornamental plants.

While the ground is soft, April is a great time to pull out invasive plants such as Japanese barberry (shown here), and burning bush, and common weeds that may have re-seeded into your garden. Make certain you get as much as the root as possible. "Painting" cut roots with weed killer will prevent them from quickly growing back and making more work later in the growing season. Replace these with garden friendly American natives such as blueberries and itea -- spring bloomers with fabulous fall color that lasts longer than burning bush.

Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for April and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com