April 2007

“There is more pleasure in making a garden than in contemplating a paradise.”
- Anne Scott-James

Normal April Weather
Weather Averages (1895 – 2007)
For Central and Southern Mountains
Courtesy of the National Climatic Data Center,

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal April Average High</td>
<td>66.5°F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal April Average Low</td>
<td>42.8°F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal April Precipitation</td>
<td>3.5”</td>
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Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>7:17 am</td>
<td>7:50 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>6:40 am</td>
<td>8:14 pm</td>
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Safe Planting Dates
Springtime weather in April is an invitation to start planting. But remember that most of our vegetable and flower plants are sensitive to frost. The “average” last frost date for most of Buncombe County is April 25. But it can vary by a couple of weeks around Buncombe County, and the “average” still means there is a 50% chance of frost.

The “safe planting date” would be when there is only about a 10% chance of frost. For most of the county the safe date does not arrive until the second week in May.
**LAWNS**

- Maintain mowing height for fescue lawns at 3 to 3½ inches.
- It is too late to get good results with crabgrass preventer because some of the seed has already germinated.
- This is a good time to hit broadleaf weeds, such as clover and dandelions, with a spot spray of a selective herbicide such as 2, 4-D, Trimec, 33 Plus or similar products.
- Do NOT fertilize cool season lawns (fescue and bluegrass). Nitrogen applied this late is an invitation for brown patch fungus disease in June.

**ORNAMENTALS**

- Need to relocate daffodils or other spring bulbs? Before leaves die down, dig them up carefully, like an herbaceous perennial, keep roots intact, and replant.
- Start checking azaleas for azalea lacebugs. Look for small tar spots on the back of the leaves. Treat with insecticide if needed.
- As soon as spring blooming shrubs have finished blooming, it's time to prune if they have gotten too large.
- Most perennials can be divided now including: phlox, asters, Shasta daisies, hostas, daylilies and liriope.
- Do not plant frost-tender flowers before May unless you will be able to cover them in case of frost.

**FRUITS**

- You can still plant all fruit crops.
- Strawberries can be planted now for a crop next year. Remove any flowers that may form on plants set out now.
- Check the established strawberry bed. Does it need weeding and fresh mulch?
- Fertilize fruit trees, blueberries, grape vines, and brambles.
- Didn’t get all the pruning done in March? It’s better to prune now, than to skip a year.

**VEGETABLES**

- When planning the vegetable garden, remember to rotate the location of plant families from year to year if possible.
- Set out transplants for cool season crops such as cabbage, broccoli, and lettuce. Make sure they are hardened off before planting into the garden.
- Early in the month you can still plant potatoes and seeds for peas, lettuce, greens, onions, carrots and radishes.
- Begin “hardening off” warm season transplants a week or two before planting in early to mid May.
- Have row cover fabric handy if frost sensitive crops are planted before May.
- If you are planning a new garden, look around for walnut trees before you start digging. The roots of walnut trees are toxic to most vegetable plants.

**OTHER**

- Hummingbirds arrive between April 10th & 15th. Get the feeders cleaned and ready to put out.

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Recommendations for the use of chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact an agent of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension.
SPOTLIGHT: BLEEDING HEART

One of the most charming of old-fashioned garden plants is bleeding hearts. There are two common species available in the garden trade: *Dicentra exima*, an American native, and *Dicentra spectabilis*, from Asia. Both are lovely plants for the informal woodland border or cottage garden. Bleeding hearts begin to make their appearance in the garden in March. Fortunately for us, they perform better in our climate than in warmer parts of the south.

Both species are excellent choices for the shade garden, performing best with some morning sun and afternoon shade. *Dicentra exima* will survive in afternoon sun in western North Carolina if given adequate water.

There are several varieties of *Dicentra exima* available. The blue-green foliage would be attractive even without the pink (or occasionally white) flowers. Plants are 12 to 18 inches tall and form clumps which will get a little larger each year. Flowering is most plentiful from mid April into June. But they will often bloom for much of the summer if the dead flower stems are broken out periodically and they do not become drought stressed.

*Dicentra spectabilis*, Japanese bleeding-heart grows about 2 feet tall and usually blooms during May and June. The plant usually starts to die down in July, so don’t be alarmed when the leaves start to turn yellow. In spite of its summer dormancy, this bleeding heart is a show-stopper in spring. The pink hearts are lined up along a long arching stem; each flower is usually an inch long with dark pink outer petals and white inner petals hanging below. It is also available in White.

KNOCK OUT ROSES

About two years ago, the first ‘Knock Out’ roses landed in American landscapes with a bang. Last year the original single flowered red selection was joined by ‘Pink Knock Out’ and ‘Double Knock Out’. This year’s introduction of ‘Rainbow Knock Out’, pink with a yellow center, is sure to be a hit as well.

Knock Out roses have become popular for several reasons. For one thing, they are quite resistant to diseases, especially black spot. They are shrub roses that grow into a fairly compact shrub of about 3 to 4 feet and bloom all summer without deadheading.

RAISED BEDS

Raised bed gardens have several advantages. They are ideal for limited space because vegetables, herbs and flowers can be planted closer together because of better root growth. Soil in a raised bed should always be well prepared with plenty of organic amendments. Since you will never walk in the bed, the soil stays loose, well drained and aerated. Besides being optimal for root growth, this allows the soil in the bed to warm up a bit faster in the spring and also usually allows you to work up the soil and plant earlier.

Beds can be framed with a variety of materials. Many vegetable gardeners are leaning toward the new “composite” (plastic) lumber products. Keep the beds small. Four feet should be a maximum width so you can reach to the center without stepping in the bed. A length of 8 to 12 feet is usually convenient. If it is longer you will get tired of walking around and be tempted to walk through.

As with any vegetable garden, the beds will need to receive at least 8 hours of sunlight. Also be prepared to water if needed, as raised beds may dry out faster. But a layer of mulch will help with that.
THE ORGANIC WAY: DISEASE RESISTANCE

One way to avoid the need to spray plants for disease control is to plant varieties that are resistant to the species’ common diseases. Unfortunately, even with the numerous hybrid plants available today, disease resistant options do not always exist. Here are a few examples of disease resistant varieties.

**Tomatoes:** Look for varieties labeled “VFN” (and sometimes others). This indicates the variety is resistant to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt, nematodes (and others).

**Garden phlox:** Varieties resistant to powdery mildew include ‘David’, ‘Delta Snow’, ‘Speed Limit 45’ (‘Cotton Candy’) and ‘Robert Poore’.


**Crabapples:** Varieties most resistant to scab, fire blight and other diseases include ‘Prairifire’, ‘Adirondack’, and ‘White Cascade’.

**Pears:** For resistance to fire blight, plant ‘Magness’ or ‘Moonglow’.

GROW SOME HERBS

Increasing numbers of gardeners are growing herbs. It’s so handy to have fresh rosemary, parsley and dill right outside the kitchen door. And most herbs are easy to grow.

Almost all herbs should be grown in full sun for best development of flavor and fragrance. Try to locate them where they will receive at least 6 hours of sun. Well drained soil is also critical for most herbs. Many of the most popular herbs are native to the Mediterranean area where the climate is dry and the soil drains freely. When starting with a clay soil, amend well with pine bark soil conditioner or small gravel to improve the drainage.

Herb plants can also be tucked into landscape plantings, flower beds, or of course the vegetable garden. Plants such as fennel, lavender, rosemary and sage can be incorporated into perennial beds. Creeping thymes may work well as edging plants or to cascade over a wall. Golden creeping oregano makes a fine ground cover.

Many herbs make great container plants as well. Lemon verbena and scented geraniums are nice on the patio where you can brush leaves to release the fragrance.

Ready to get started? Visit the Spring Herb Festival at the WNC Farmers’ Market the first weekend in May. There is lots of information to be had as well as plants, seeds and other products.

PLANT PROBLEM CLINICS

Through the summer, Extension Master Gardener volunteers will be available to look at plant problems and answer gardening questions the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month. The Master Gardener Plant Clinics will be set up at the Western North Carolina Farmers’ Market, in the breezeway between the retail buildings from 11:00 am until 2:00 pm.
ALMANAC GARDENER

The Almanac Gardener program on UNC-TV will begin its 24th season Saturday, April 7 and will run through August 18th. This popular NC Cooperative Extension program will air Saturdays at 12 noon and rebroadcast Sundays at 11:30 pm. Tune in to UNC-TV for weekly updates from North Carolina Extension agents.

GARDENERS’ ALMANAC

Can’t remember what garden chores to do when? Our Gardeners’ Almanac is available to supplement the newsletter. This “Guide to Environmentally Friendly Gardening in Buncombe County” provides lists of garden chores for each month, a garden lesson each month, a guide to planting vegetables in western North Carolina, a garden glossary, and references to lots of helpful leaflets.

Pick up your copy at the Buncombe County Extension Center for only $5.

Are You Polluting The Water?

Ever think about where the water goes that runs off your yard during a heavy rain? Storm water does not go into the sewer or to a water treatment plant. It runs directly into a roadside ditch which carries it into a creek or river. And what does your water carry with it?

Fertilizer materials can pollute waterways with excess amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous. You can reduce the chances of pollution by using slow-release fertilizers which dissolve more slowly than “garden fertilizer” (such as 10-10-10). Also use only the amount of fertilizer needed to avoid excess material to wash away more readily. After application, sweep up any fertilizer from the sidewalk or driveway.

Of course, soil erosion is also detrimental to living organisms in the water. Avoid soil runoff by keeping soil covered with plants such as grass or other groundcover plants, or at least covering the soil with mulch. A healthy groundcover, especially grasses, will also act as an effective filter to trap not only soil, but fertilizer and pesticide contaminants before they leave your property.
COMING EVENTS

April 7  Spring Out: The Wonderful World of Water at the WNC Nature Center. Fun activities for the whole family.

April 10  Growing in the Mountains Series, “Growing Mosses and Ferns”, presented by Extension Master Gardeners, at The North Carolina Arboretum, 10:00 am. Free, no registration required.

April 14  Plant Problem Clinic, by Extension Master Gardeners, at the WNC Farmers’ Market, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm in the breezeway between the retail buildings.

April 28  Plant Problem Clinic, by Extension Master Gardeners, at the WNC Farmers’ Market, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm in the breezeway between the retail buildings.

May 4 – 5  Days in the Garden, Botanical Gardens at Asheville. Friday, 1:00 – 6:00 pm Plant Sales. Saturday, 8:00 am – 3:00 pm, plants, food, crafts, entertainment and guided walks.

May 4 – 5  Spring Herb Festival, WNC Farmers’ Market. Friday and Saturday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. Sunday, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. Plants, herbal products, crafts, garden information and educational programs.

Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter, but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.