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.

Normal April Weather
Weather Averages
For Asheville, North Carolina

Normal April Average High 68°F
Normal April Average Low 45°F
Normal April Precipitation 3.3”

Hours of Daylight for Asheville, NC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>7:16 am</td>
<td>7:51 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>6:39 am</td>
<td>8:15 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in activities mentioned in this newsletter. Please contact Linda Blue at 828-255-5522 during business hours at least 3 days prior to the event to discuss accommodations.
Garden Chores for April

Lawns

- Stressed lawns might benefit from core aerating. This really should have been done last month, so rent an aerator soon. Aerating will allow spring rains to soak into the ground more readily.
- Do NOT fertilize cool season lawns (fescue and bluegrass). Nitrogen applied this late is an invitation for brown patch fungus disease in June.
- Maintain mowing height for fescue lawns at 3 to 3 1/2 inches.
- It is too late to expect good results from applying crabgrass preventer now. Much of the seed has already begun to germinate.

Ornamentals

- As soon as spring blooming shrubs have finished blooming, it’s time to prune if they have gotten too large.
- Evergreen shrubs can be pruned now through June.
- This is still a good time to plant shrubs and herbaceous perennials. Remember to keep them watered this summer.
- Do not plant frost-tender flowers before May unless you will be able to cover them in case of frost.
- Winter annual weeds such as chickweed and henbit should be addressed before they go to seed. Hand pulling is the best option in landscape beds. Broadleaf herbicides can be used as long as the chemical will not contact landscape plants.

Fruits

- After flowering is finished, consider beginning your fungicide spray program to prevent black rot on grapes and brown rot on peaches and plums.
- All fruit crops can still be planted.
- Fertilize fruit trees, blueberries, grape vines, and brambles.
- Finish pruning brambles, grape vines and fruit trees.

Vegetables

- You can still plant potatoes as well as plant seeds for lettuce, beets and leafy greens.
- Set out transplants for cool season crops such as cabbage, broccoli, and lettuce. Make sure they are hardened off before planting into the garden.
- Asparagus should be coming up soon. Cut spears when they are about 4 to 6 inches long.
- Have row cover fabric handy if frost sensitive crops are planted before May.
- Perennial herbs such as rosemary, thyme and lavender can be planted later in the month.

Other

- The first hummingbirds arrive in our area between April 10th and 15th. Get the hummingbird feeders cleaned and ready to go out.
SPOTLIGHT: Coral Honeysuckle

Speaking of hummingbirds. If you want to attract them, coral honeysuckle is a good plant to add to your landscape. It is always in full bloom in mid-April when the first hummers arrive.

*Lonicera sempervirens*, trumpet honeysuckle or coral honeysuckle, falls into the category of “under-utilized native plants.” It has long been one of my favorite spring flowers and certainly a top choice for a vine. Although it grows rapidly, this honeysuckle does not have the invasive tendencies of its introduced cousin, Japanese honeysuckle. The coral-red flowers are not fragrant but the April and May cascade is welcome. Wild plants usually have few flowers after May, but nursery selections may bloom all summer, especially in a sunny location. Selections are also available with yellow or red flowers.

Another nice feature of coral honeysuckle is that it keeps some leaves in winter. It is not truly evergreen so the number of leaves retained will depend on the severity of the winter. It can work as an adequate screening plant on a fence or trellis which it will climb by twining.

Not a fussy plant, this native will bloom best in full sun, but will be happy with a half day of sun. It is also not picky about soil, but will grow fastest in good garden soil with adequate moisture.

The only pest problems is occasional aphid infestations in early spring. Make it a habit to check the plant in March or early April for aphids covering flower buds. You may have few flowers if you don’t zap them with some insecticidal soap.

Controlling Ground Ivy

One of the truly pesky weeds is ground ivy, also known as creeping Charlie and gill-over-the-ground. This member of the mint family creeps along the ground, rooting at nodes as it goes. The leaves resemble the house plant commonly known as Swedish ivy and it has a somewhat mint-like aroma when mowed.

Because of its perennial and creeping habit, ground ivy can become quite prolific, especially in damp, shady areas. Unfortunately, many people report it being nearly impervious to most herbicides, including Roundup (glyphosate). Glyphosate would probably work best in late summer.

Ground ivy can be resistant to 2,4-D but this product reportedly works well when applied when the weed is in bloom in the spring. For some reason it also has been found to work well immediately after the first frost in fall. At other times better results would be expected with combination lawn herbicides containing 2,4-D, MCCP and Dicamba. Although these products will not damage established lawns, be extremely careful with them around landscape plants.

When ground ivy gets into flower or shrubbery beds the best options are continual pulling or repeatedly burning the leaves and stems off with one of the organic herbicides like Scyth or BurnOut.
Popular Herbs

Although having an herb garden near the kitchen door for ready use can be delightful, herbs do not have to be limited to a separate garden. Many plants combine well in flower beds and perennial borders. According to the National Garden Bureau, the ten most popular herbs today are: chives, basil, rosemary, lemon verbena, sage, oregano, sweet marjoram, parsley, French tarragon and thyme.

Not only are most herbs easy to grow, they actually don’t want too much pampering. Many popular herbs originate from Mediterranean climates where they are adapted to growing in poor soils and dry conditions. Give them plenty of sunlight and only modest amounts of fertilizer. Water to get plants established, then only when conditions become quite dry.

Most herbs do need very well drained soil. This is especially true for rosemary and lavender to survive the winter. Heavy clay soil should be well amended with pine bark soil conditioner or small gravel. Herb plants are also quite adaptable to growing in pots. Container herbs are a nice addition to the deck or patio.

Don’t forget about the WNC Herb Festival the first weekend in May. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about different herbs, as well as purchase plants and products. Visiting all of the plant vendors is a fun “scratch and sniff” experience.

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 Saturday 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. Stop by for a visit.

Of course you are always welcome to visit the Master Gardener Office at the Extension Center at 94 Coxe Ave. Asheville. Or call them on the Garden Hotline, Monday—Thursday, 8:30 - 4:30 and Friday, 8:30 -12:30.

Almanac Gardener 2009 Season

Almanac Gardener begins its 26th season on Saturday, April 4 at noon on the statewide UNC-TV network. The Saturday show will be repeated at 11:30 am on Sunday.

Almanac Gardener is a half-hour home horticulture program telecast for 20 weeks from April through August. It is one of the longest running series on UNC-TV and is a co-production of UNC-TV and Cooperative Extension at N.C. State University.

Viewers send questions to Almanac Gardener and Horticultural experts from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension answer them on the air. The show also airs how-to horticultural features that are produced in the field.

Regular Extension panelists include, Karen Neill, Horticultural Agent, Guilford County; Linda Blue, Horticultural Agent, Buncombe County; Bill Lord Environmental Agent, Franklin County; and Lucy Bradley, Urban Horticultural Specialist NCSU. Mike Gray is a co-producer and host of Almanac Gardener.
Buyer Beware

This article was first printed in 1997. Twelve years later, these exact same advertisements are still out there—along with similar ones.

As spring approaches, advertisements espousing miraculous plants to solve all your landscaping problems sprout as prolifically as crabgrass. If it sounds too good to be true……well, you know the rest. Here are some prime examples:

Mosquito plant is reputed to repel mosquitoes within a 10 foot radius. This is actually a lemon scented geranium, which, like other lemon scented plants does contain citronella oil. But the oil is only released from the plant when the leaves are bruised or crushed. Dr. Arthus Tucker, a plant fragrance specialist at Delaware State College, suggests that the best way to benefit from the citronella oil is to rub the crushed leaves on your skin. It is a good idea to test it on a small spot a couple of times to test for allergy before rubbing all over.

CanadaGreen and other grass blends are promoted as producing a year-round green carpet in any part of the country. In fact CanadaGreen is a blend containing 25% Kentucky bluegrass, 49% creeping red fescue and 26% annual rye. The annual rye will germinate quickly, giving an immediate appearance of plush green lawn. But this grass will die out with the onset of warm weather in June. The remaining stand of bluegrass and red fescue will then appear quite thin. Red fescue is recommended in our area only for partial shade. In the sun it will die out during hot dry weather, leaving you with the 25% Kentucky bluegrass. The cost for this miracle blend to cover 1,000 square feet is $20. You can buy a good quality hybrid fescue at a local garden center for half that amount.

BACK TO BASICS
Helping Buncombe County Residents Survive (& Thrive) Through Troubled Times

Pack Memorial Library
67 Haywood St. Asheville, NC
Classes are free. No pre-registration

Tuesday, April 7, 6:00-7:30 pm
Growing Your Own Vegetables

Tuesday, April 14, 6:00—7:30 pm
Backyard Small Fruit

Tuesday, April 21, 6:00—7:30 pm
Being Dollar-Wise in the Landscape and Garden

Also consider the next 2 Extension Master Gardener programs for “Gardening in the Mountains” at The North Carolina Arboretum. Talks start at 10:00. They are also free.

April 14 - Integrating Edibles into the Landscape
May 12 - Gardening for Tough Times
COMING EVENTS

• April 11 - **Plant Problem Clinics**, by Extension Master Gardeners, WNC Farmers’ Market, & 25 11:00am—2:00pm in the breezeway between the retail buildings.

• April 14 - **Gardening in the Mountains: “Integrating Edibles into the Landscape”**, Presented by the Extension Master Gardeners at The North Carolina Arboretum, 10:00—11:00 am. Free admission, no pre-registration.

• April 18 - **Master Gardener Information Table at Southern States**, 464 Riverside Dr. Asheville, NC 11:00am—2:00pm.

• May 1 - **Days in the Gardens**, Botanical Gardens at Asheville
  - Friday, 1-6pm, plant sales
  - Saturday, 8am—3pm, plants, food, crafts, entertainment, guided walks

• May 1 - **Spring Herb Festival**, WNC Farmers’ Market
  - Friday and Saturday, 9am—5pm, Sunday, 10am—3pm
  - Plants, herbal products, crafts, garden information, educational programs

• May 12 - **Gardening in the Mountains Series, “Gardening for Tough Times”**, Presented by the Extension Master Gardeners at The North Carolina Arboretum, 10:00-11:00am. Free admission, no pre-registration.