

Janet B. Carson
Extension Horticulture Specialist

Zone Report April 2016

April is typically one of the prettiest months in the garden. From spring blooming shrubs and trees, to flowering bulbs there is a sea of color in most landscapes. Many gardeners were worried about this year's spring display since we saw so many late blooms in December, but hopefully the plants made it through with blooms to spare. Don't just concentrate on a spring blooming garden. Make sure your landscape has plants that bloom in all seasons. When your spring blooming shrubs have finished their display, do any necessary pruning. Remember that not all shrubs need annual pruning. In an average year, we don't want to remove more than 1/3 of the plants. If you have some really overgrown shrubs, they can be pruned hard occasionally but do so as soon after bloom as possible and give them tender care all season with regular water and an application of fertilizer to help them rebound.

Visit your local nurseries and garden centers to see the new selections. If you had some plant casualties now is a great time to replace them. Consider the time of year you need color help in the garden and choose plants that can extend your color palette.

Vegetable gardening is in full swing, and some of us never stopped. With season extenders we can garden year-round now. Harvest season of cool season vegetables is in high gear, and we can still plant until mid-month more cool season vegetables. Wait for warm soil conditions to plant the warm season tomatoes, peppers, corn, bean and squash. Last year it was so cool, many didn't get them planted until May and we still had a good crop. As you harvest, replant. Do this all season and make the most use of your garden space and you will constantly have fresh vegetables to harvest. Make sure you rotate what you plant where to cut back on disease issues.

Cool season annuals may be looking great now, and you can continue to enjoy them. Pansies and other winter annuals should continue to shine in the garden through April and May. Violas will last even longer. Summer bedding plants are now appearing in markets. Some summer annuals will tolerate cooler conditions better than others. Petunias, callibrachoa, verbena and sweet alyssum can be planted now with no problem, but hold off a few weeks for heat lovers which prefer warm soil conditions. If you are looking for some good summer choices, consider the Arkansas Diamond Plants. These summer annuals are chosen for durability and ease of growth statewide in Arkansas. They are grown in Arkansas for Arkansas gardens and chosen by a team of professionals from the Arkansas Green Industry and Extension. This year's choices include: Penta Graffiti Bright Red, Plectranthus Velvet Elvis and Cuphea Sriracha Pink. The Penta and Cuphea are heat lovers and will thrive in full sun and bloom all season long. Plectranthus Velvet Elvis is a purple flowering plant that would do best with a bit of protection from the hot afternoon sun. Look for these plants at your local nursery.

You can begin to move houseplants outside by the end of the month, and bring out the tropical flowering plants, bananas, hibiscus and ferns you were storing in the garage or under your house. They probably don't look great, but repot them, give them a haircut and start fertilizing. Tropical flowering plants should be cut back by $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ at least. They bloom on new growth, so you want to encourage lots of new foliage. Gradually expose the houseplants to sunlight. Many of them will actually do well in the shade throughout the summer. Scatter pots out in your landscape beds and mulch them in. This will give you some interesting textures and color in the landscape, and your irrigation system can help with watering.

Many lawns look like a meadow of wildflowers. Whether you call them weeds or wildflowers, flowering plants in the lawn mean seeds are forming and your "wildflowers" will increase next year. If you aren't enamored with the flowering weeds, try to keep them mowed now to prevent additional seed set. Many of the weeds are going to be dying out in a few weeks when warmer conditions occur. Herbicide usage now is not very effective and may actually hinder your lawns green-up. Your lawn is in transition now from winter dormancy to summer green. Keep the lawn area mowed and wait on your first application of fertilizer until your lawn has totally greened up. Then you can worry about summer weeds.

April is always a favorite month for gardeners. By now, we hopefully have seen the last of spring freezes. We can garden comfortably and not be overly concerned with insects and diseases, but the heat and humidity along with insects and diseases are on the horizon, so keep a close vigil on your garden and let's all hope for a better growing season this year!