

HOME & GARDEN

MAY EDITION

Tuesday & Sunday, May 10 & 15, 2005

SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Never too late to get flowers to



Flower power: Season's floral selections. **Page 3**

Floors: Nature-made or man-made? **Page 4**

Garden party: "Green" tips from Sally Ketchum. **Page 5**

Local real estate: Market good for starter and high-end second homes. **Page 5**

"Recycle" re-cap: Look at Benzie home tour. **Page 6**

Have story ideas? Tips? Comments? We are doing Home & Garden monthly through October, so let's hear from our readers!

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BY ED HUTCHISON
Special to the Record-Eagle

The spring planting frenzy begins, rain or shine, about the second week of May in Michigan and ready or not, you are confronted with petunias, tomatoes and lots of other transplants ready to take home and plant.

Sometimes the weather and calendar together well, but often they do not. The result is that by late May, your garden is not in and plants seem scarce. Don't worry. There is still time when Memorial Day (and later) arrives to get in a garden — and have wonderful results.

Here are some tips to help you choose healthy, robust annual plants for this year's garden — even if you must wait until mid-June to do so.

If you buy plants at big box chain stores, choose carefully. Why? It's because the big guys are more likely to have overly mature transplants than the locals who stage crops for successful consumer plantings. My experience has been that the chains roll out four-inch potted annuals now through July 4, hoping, I guess, to capture the needs of gardeners who did not plant earlier.

Avoid plants in pots or cell packs with roots snaking from the bottom. This is a sure sign the plant has outgrown its surroundings. If you must choose one of these, then break up the root mass before planting. You will likely find a coil of roots around what is left of the soil. Reduce the root mass by half — this will stir new root development.

Choose plants that are flowerless or in bud. An



Photo/Ed Hutchison

You can still have colorful flowers this summer, even if nothing is planted now. But quick action is important as planting season wanes in early June. This bed of yellow marigolds is a good example of what can be created by planting an entire bank of the same variety.

annual plant that is flowering in its cell pack shows that it is nearing maturity. Much like a third grader adjusts better to a new school than a junior in high school, a young plant gets used to its new home better than one that is already blooming.

The trick here is in realizing that many dwarf varieties of flowers are just fine starting bloom in the packs — growers like to show plants that show some color. But if you are looking at a marigold, for example, that will grow 12 inches or taller and the thing is stretched out and in bloom in the pack — and this is not

uncommon — walk away.

Immediately after planting, treat the transplants to what amounts to an energy drink. Several types of water-soluble fertilizers formulated with nutrients to encourage root growth are available. Look for these products in the lawn and garden chemical aisles — they will be labeled as products for giving plants a quick start to the season. These are not the products loosely called "bloom boosters." Those promote vigorous blooming; what you are after here is a product that is meant for new transplants, a one application kind of a deal.

If tomatoes are your thing, don't hesitate to buy and grow a potted plant — I've seen these late in the season planted and thriving in four-inch pots and much bigger, some complete with cages and fruit developing.

Buying one of these is a good way to make up for lost time — chances are you will gain three weeks or more on the growing season. It is not as good, in my experience, as having bought a robust transplant in mid- or late May and getting it going — but buying one of these "well along" tomatoes may well yield you a nice crop of tomatoes.

Expect to plant a knee-high in a three-g... while that... lot for "just... guess is you... did so — fe... about our s... picking an... ripened to... when it cor... vine.

Our growi... Michigan is... and by plan... June, at lea... haps as mu... ing weeks h... This means... sense to re... late-plant... and this bo... points:

- Feed th... after planti... "upstart" f...
- Deadhe... rather than... seed.

- Fertiliz... with a ferti... for outdoor...
- Take ca... do not wilt... this is espe... for the first... roots are d... their new h...

- Don't m... time by ove... doing so lo... with more... needs and... foliage inst... be it vegeta...

Ed Hutchison lance writer and columnist

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