

# Planting early without paying for it later

April got us fired up for another gardening season, but May is the month we have waited for since putting our tools away last fall.

Most of us have lived here long enough to know that it can be full of weather ups and downs. Remember just a few weeks ago when we went from 80 and sunny to 30s and snow in just two days? Back in April, a customer asked if the beautiful weather scared me. I told her it didn't because I had absolutely no expectations beyond enjoying one day at a time.

May is much the same. It can be one of the busiest months of the gardening season and one of the most frustrating. We have to wait to plant tender annuals until all danger of frost has passed (May 15-June 1), or risk having to replant later.

Of course, many of us choose to buy plants and then drag them in and out as the weather demands, or plant them and have the old sheets ready to cover at a moment's notice. I would suggest planting cold tolerant annuals first and waiting a week or two before planting the more

tender of them.

Pansies, dianthus, violas, alyssum, calandula, snapdragons and lobelia are some of the most cold-tolerant annuals while coleus, impatiens, moss rose, salvia and zinnia are tender and more likely to be damaged by a late frost.

Think about trying something new this year in your containers or window boxes. There are lots of new varieties of annuals that perform beautifully in the garden. I love all the new coleus combined with fuchsia, tuberous begonias and impatiens for the shade. In the sun, consider osteospermum with sweet potato vine and the annual grass pennisetum rubrum.

You know how it lifts our spirits when we get a new haircut or pair of shoes? The same goes for plants. Don't be shy about experimenting with new colors and textures; sometimes it's just what we need to get us out of the cookie cutter planter rut.

If weeds have shown up where the flowers are to be planted, make sure you get rid of them before planting. If there is nothing else growing there, use a non-selective herbicide to kill them. There are sev-

eral brands to choose from both chemical (Roundup, Total) and non-chemical (Weed attack, Burnout).

Applying a pre-emergent like preen or corn gluten after your new plants have recovered from transplanting will keep new weed seeds from germinating, cutting down on the time you have to spend weeding through the summer. Keep an eye out for insects and disease and remember — the sooner you intervene, the easier both are to control.

Regardless of what or when you choose to plant, time spent now on preparing your soil will pay dividends later with improved plant growth and health. Working organic matter into your soil will improve the water holding capacity of light, sandy soil and help break up heavy clay soil.

There is a new product on the market this year called 'soil perfecter' from the Espoma Company. It is an all-natural soil condi-

tioner that permanently improves clay and sandy soil. Because it does not break down or degrade, one application is all that is needed. You can add it to all soils and potting mixes to prevent soil compacting and promote root growth. Espoma also makes a complete line of organic fertilizers for your yard and garden. Unlike basic chemical fertilizers, which wash away during rain or regular watering, espoma tones are not water soluble. This means they remain in the soil for months, providing the steady, balanced meals your plants need.

Gardening is the number one hobby in America. When we garden, we are in touch with all our senses. It grounds us and provides a sense of accomplishment when we see the results of our labor. Most gardeners are happiest when sharing tips, techniques, successes and failures with others. So garden and give the gift of gardening to others.



**BY JEANINE RUBERT**  
Local columnist

I will leave you with a thought to hold on to while you garden this month: "Hope for the future is at the heart of all gardening."

If you have comments or questions, e-mail Pine Hill Nursery owner Jeanine Rubert at:

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For more on local gardening, visit our Traverse Garden blog for blogs and photos at [www.TraverseGarden.com](http://www.TraverseGarden.com)

When  
prune

Q: When should I prune Lilacs? A: They don't bloom until late spring. Pruning immediately after bloom allows the plant to take over old stalks and produce new shoots. Lilacs need to be pruned when they are not full size. They also bloom sweeter when the non-bloom stalks are cut around the shrub, about 1/2 inch from the plant. Spraying with lime sulfur and

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