

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR APRIL INCLUDES HUMMINGBIRD SEMINAR

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Deborah Repasz

Not satisfied with the occasional, chance appearance of hummingbirds in the home landscape, many gardeners are creating habitat gardens with plants specially chosen to invite these enchanting creatures into the landscape. Master Gardener Deborah Repasz will provide an educational program on hummingbird gardens on Saturday, April 5, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

April is typically a very busy and pleasant month for the gardener. Gardening activities have been in fast-forward mode for the past few days. Here's hoping that the month of April continues to bring showers. Review the following checklist for April's gardening chores.

PERIWINKLES: One warm season annual that many folks set out too early is the periwinkle. These are

warm weather plants. Periwinkles planted before mid-April are much more susceptible to a fungal blight disease (known as *Phytophthora* stem blight and root rot) that can wipe out sections or an entire bed of plants. Delay planting periwinkles until the weather is consistently warm.

LAWNS: Mid-March to the first week of April is

the recommended time to fertilize lawns. A good way to determine when to fertilize is to wait until you have mowed the predominant lawn grass twice. If you fertilize too early, you will be fertilizing the winter weeds! This allows time for the grass to green up naturally without pushing it into growth.

CALADIUMS: If you asked me what some of my favorite plants for summer color are, caladiums would absolutely be at the top of my list. Caladiums are ideal for both novice and experienced gardeners because they are so easy to grow. You would be hard-pressed to find a plant that provides such reliable color in areas that get shade. Select caladium tubers while there are ample stocks available but do not plant caladiums too early.

Caladiums typically should be planted from April into early May. Caladiums need warm soil temperatures (at least 70 degrees) for best growth. Caladiums pro-



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duce delightful color splashes of white, pink, rose, red, burgundy, chartreuse or green, often with several colors combining in wonderful patterns to provide elegant beauty to local landscapes. Their bright leaves with bold textures embellish our shady gardens from May until October, when the tubers go dormant. Caladiums are remarkably free from major insect or disease problems.

STORING LEFTOVER SEED: Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clips and storing in a tightly sealed glass jar in your refrigerator until needed. Adding 1 or 2 tablespoons of powdered milk in a cloth bag to reduce the humidity within the jar can also be very beneficial to maintaining long-term seed viability.

SUMMER ANNUALS: One tendency shoppers have is to buy transplants of summer annuals only with open flowers. Young transplants that have few or no flowers may be a smarter purchase since these plants will grow larger before flowering. The result will be a more impressive floral display in your home garden.

This practice results in a turf that is more resistant to summer stress. Use a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer (such as 15-5-10) and distribute with a broadcast (cyclone) or a

drop-type spreader. Uniform distribution is essential to prevent light and dark streaks in the lawn. For better distribution, divide the fertilizer into two equal applications. Spread one application lengthwise and the other crosswise.

PURCHASING TOPSOIL: Use good quality topsoil from a reputable source for replenishing flowerbeds, filling low spots in the lawn, etc. Nutgrass and other hard-to-kill weeds are sometimes introduced this way.

At a Glance: Gardening for Jewels...Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are very welcome visitors in our gardens. These “jewels of the gardens” can contribute wonderful and unique additions to your landscape such as movement, color and sounds. Hummingbirds even provide a level of pest control—think of them as miniature flycatchers as they also eat soft-bodied insects.

Hummingbird gardens strive to attract, welcome and nurture these fascinating and lovely creatures of flight that add so much to the pleasures of gardening. And with their abundance of bright, colorful flowers, these gardens also can contribute to the beauty of the overall landscape.

Small backyard hummingbird gardens are simple and fun to establish. To learn how to get started or to enhance your existing skill level, be sure to pre-

register for this upcoming seminar to be held on Saturday, April 5, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. by Master Gardener Deborah Repasz.

She will discuss how to create a garden for butterflies including host and nectar plant selections for our growing area. Plants discussed are proven winners grown in the speaker's home landscape, as well as other resources to utilize to attract hummingbirds.

This seminar is sponsored by the Galveston County Master Gardener Association as a public service to our county residents. It is are free-of-charge but pre-registration is required (e-mail GALV3@wt.net or phone 281-534-3413, ext. 12).

