

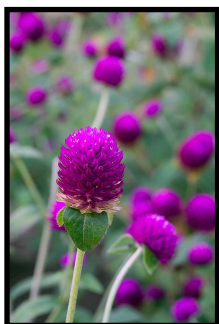
## Horticulture Hints April 2020

I must admit, dear GC members, I'm not feeling particularly witty at this time; nor at capacity with words of wisdom. Strange times indeed. However, gardening is always first and foremost on my mind this time of the year. That is the one good thing about this quarantine: there's always gardening.

With the heat that we had for a few weeks, and lack of rain (five weeks and counting), watering has become a time-consuming pastime. Over the last year, we have planted seven crape myrtle trees, and really don't want to lose them. So hauling hoses is the latest exercise. Next will be washing cars to remove the layers of pollen. But that's a discussion for another time.

The plant sale has been postponed until sometime in October, and the April meeting has been cancelled. Mostly that means that many of us will have plenty of plants to babysit all summer until such time as they can be brought together for sale to the public. I also have three extra blooming houseplants for the monthly raffle that I'll be holding onto until we meet again. Not complaining, mind you, but I may grow attached....(pardon the pun, if that is one...)

April is a great time to start flower seeds if you haven't done that yet. Zinnias are always a good choice, and there are so many varieties and colors available these days, you will always be able to find one that fits your landscape. If you wish to start from seed, you can find dwarf, single petal, double petal, standard, heirloom, almost any color you can think of. Zinnias can handle all the heat Florida throws at them, and they do well in containers as well as in the ground.



Another good one is globe amaranth (*Gomphrena globosa*). This lovely purple-pink flower loves heat, grows well in containers, does well in full sun and tolerates neglect. Could you ask for anything more? But wait!!

On top of all this, the flowers dry extremely well, and maintain their lovely color after they are dried.

And then there are sunflowers. A huge group of summer flowers, and one of my personal favorites. The native narrow leaf sunflowers are tall and multi-flowered. Beach sunflowers are rangey and showy. I'm experimenting this year with different varieties of annual sunflowers to see how well they transplant into pots. I'll let you know how that goes. I may have to fight off the squirrels, and my gloves are off. They get enough from my landscape. They don't need the sunflowers as well. Even though they think they do.

And don't forget the salvias. Here, too, is a huge group of flowers, beloved of pollinators. But you have to be a little careful on this one: not all salvias are created equal. There are both annual and perennial salvias, and some do better in sun than others. And I have found that they also aren't as drought tolerant as some tend to believe. Perhaps it's because of the extremely well-draining beach sand that masquerades as soil around here. But I have found that keeping them fairly well-watered gives them a much better chance of having long-lived flowers. A little extra dose of balanced fertilizer helps as well (every few weeks during blooming season).



April is a great month to clean out those water gardens or ponds. And what a great job to do while you're quarantined! You get to get down into that nice cool water, and get your hands dirty (literally). Then when you have it all nice and wonderfully clean, don't forget to fertilize those water plants you might have in pots. There are fertilizer tablets available online, and couldn't be easier to use: just slip a tablet down between the inside of the pot and the dirt, and leave it alone.

Since it's already been fairly warm, your grass has already awakened. That is, providing you're watering it. Now is the time to fertilize if you haven't done so.

If you're planting herbs, plant extra parsley, dill and fennel. These three will attract black swallowtail butterflies, and the juveniles can share the harvest with you.

Remember, dear members, stay safe. Wash your hands! And you **are** allowed to take showers now as well.

Safe Gardening! Hopefully we'll all be together in May.