

Horticulture Hints

A garden is always a series of losses set against a few triumphs, like life itself. - May Sarton

March 2021

Well, Spring has well and truly arrived! The way that I can tell is that the azaleas are in



Old Azaleas along Old Floral City Road

their full glory, with the dominant color being (my favorite) brilliant pink. I'll not forget the first winter we spent in Florida, I was floored to see the color all over the place as early as mid-February. Then the little pink phlox showed up along the roadsides shortly thereafter. I fell in love with Florida all over again. This has to be the best time of the year. The temperatures are moderate, rain is occasional and the flowering season has begun!

My tomatoes are in the ground. Perhaps a bit early, since it's not guaranteed that we won't still have a freeze. But they were more than ready to get out of their small-ish pots. So in the ground (raised bed) they go. Some years ago, I ran into an article online called "Everything But the Kitchen Sink" method of planting tomatoes. Of course, this person lived somewhere north of here, where they actually have something called soil. But I have adopted the method as my own, and have had great success with it. Of course,

we all know by now, that you're supposed to plant tomatoes as deeply as you can, since all those little hairs on the stem will develop into roots, thereby supporting the plant, and allowing it to absorb much more in the way of nutrients. But after you dig that very deep hole, and before you put the plant in, add the following items to the bottom of it: a shovelful of compost, a very large handful of organic fertilizer, about half a cup of crushed eggshells, several aspirin tablets, and a quarter cup of Epsom salts. The article that I read advised several fish heads, or even



Blossom End Rot

whole fish. Not having much access to that kind of thing whenever I'm ready to plant, I have substituted the compost and organic fertilizer. Once I realized just how much of a heavy feeder a tomato plant is, this all became much more self explanatory. And it seems that blossom end rot is due to a calcium deficiency in the soil; therefore, crushed eggshells made sense. And the aspirin tablets apparently prevent certain bacteria from taking hold. I'm looking forward to many little tomatoes before it gets too hot.

Speaking of heat, March is a transition month, where cool weather crops can still be started, and warm weather crops may also be put in the ground. Cool weather crops that can still be planted are carrots, collards, lettuce, mustard, radishes and turnips. In addition, warm weather crops that can go in the ground now are beans, both pole and bush types, melons, both cantaloupe and watermelon, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peas, peppers, both sweet and hot, and summer squash.

Some annuals that can be started this month are ageratum, alyssum, celosia, calliopsis, crossandra, dusty miller, gaillardia, gazania, geranium, impatiens, lobelia, marigold, pentas, phlox, rudbeckia, salvia, streptocarpus, sweet William, thunbergia, torenia, verbena, vinca and zinnia. There are quite a few in this list that I have not tried yet, but plan to. It may take me a few years....

Now is the time to prune back anything (not spring blooming) that may have gotten some freeze damage. Anything that **is** spring blooming (example: azaleas) can wait until the blooming period is over. Then, prune back any branches that cross each other, look diseased or dead, or are growing too far out of bounds. March is also a good time to fertilize your lawn. If weeds are a problem for your lawn, you can apply a weed-and-feed product, but don't use both a regular fertilizer product at the same time. Either/or, not both. And remember, water lightly after you apply.

As the weather continues to warm, you may see lubbers start to come out of the ground. When they're freshly hatched, called nymphs, they appear black with yellow or orange stripes. And they will appear by the hundreds. You may wonder why your plant is moving. Never fear. Not your Little Shop of Horrors. Just lubbers. I don't spray anything, but these little b— — — have to go away. I still don't spray, but I drown the little buggers (as many as I can get my fingers on) in hot, soapy water. I do a 'lubber patrol' every morning, bowl of hot soapy water in (gloved) hand. The method is simple: pick and hold under water for a second or two. There are

times when 'picking' involves grabbing a handful. When they're brand new, they will crawl to the highest point they can find in order to dry off in the morning sun. The newer they are, the slower they move. So getting out just after sunrise can net you a lot of drowned lubbers. In case you don't know, they love crinum lilies. Late last summer, "mom" laid her eggs just under the surface of the ground beneath the crinum plant. In the absence of crinums, however, any other green thing will do. They prefer dry, warm



Lubber Nymphs

and un-mulched areas. And they seem to go back to the same areas each year. Much like salmon swim upstream? Unscientific. Just a guess. But seriously, keep an eye out. And Happy Gardening!