



Gardening...A Great Remedy For Anxiety

Gardening is a great remedy for the anxiety caused by our current situation, with an added bonus that it doesn't need to be approved by the FDA. But gardening can create its own anxiety, if it isn't done properly or at the right time. Here are a few tips for what you should be doing in the garden to ease frustration and create positive outcomes.

Now is the time to sow hardy annual flowers directly outdoors. This includes sweet alyssum, bachelor buttons, cosmos, and sweet peas. By mid-May, dahlia tubers can be planted and annual fuchsias can safely go outside. Remember that May and even June can be tricky weather months. We can have wonderful warm, sunny days which then revert to cold and rain. Be patient! Wait to plant those flowers and herbs that you have started indoors or have purchased as starts. By the last half of May, they can be hardened off by setting them out during the day and bring in for the night for about a week to get them acclimated to the outdoor temperatures.

In the vegetable garden, leafy greens, peas, beets, and carrots can continue to be planted. Try succession planting, spacing out the planting of a vegetable every two to four weeks, to extend the harvest and add to the food bank coffers. Wait until closer to the end of May, if the soil has warmed up, to start the direct seeding of squashes, cucumbers, and pumpkins. When planting, remember to give plants adequate space and provide a trellis of some kind for the cucumbers and squashes to climb. If June turns in to "January", keep an eye out on these as the seeds may rot and replanting may be required.

Now is also a great time to get those containers started. This year, try mixing in some vegetables with your flowers and herbs. Rainbow chard or ruby lettuce are a nice addition. Look for interesting plant combinations but keep your sun lovers and shade lovers in different pots and in the right place. Also, check the water requirements when you mix plants together in containers. Those tags in the plant pots have a lot of great information!

Are your perennials getting too big for their spot? If so, now is a good time to dig up and divide summer and fall bloomers. It's best if they are divided before they are six inches tall. Have a plant swap with your friends and share.

For the garden in general, compost is always a good idea. It is a wonderful soil amendment and can add nutrients naturally. Add a top dressing of compost when planting vegetables, annuals, perennials, trees, or shrubs, whether they are in the ground or in a pot. It helps make the soil more productive and will help keep plants healthier. Your lawn would be happy to get a ¼ inch top dressing as well.

Make sure to enjoy rhododendron blooms and then, if they need it, give them a bit of fertilizer and a pruning. Plan on pruning no more than a third of the shrub. Heathers and other flowering shrubs can also be pruned after they flower.

Another lesson that many people learn the hard way (including me) is that spireas and forsythia should be thinned rather than pruned back. Luckily, spireas are pretty hardy. Mine currently look like they had an "at home haircut" rather than going to the salon. Like hair, they too will grow back!

Gardening can take your mind off of the "new normal" and bring a sense of peace and accomplishment. If you're tired of talking to your housemates, you can always talk to your plants. They love to listen.

For those of you who have inquired about the Master Gardener Plant Sale, please stay tuned. At the time of this writing, a decision had not been yet made on the sale.

A reminder that you can submit your plant and pest questions to the Master Gardeners. Please email and send photos if you have them, to: masonmastergardener@gmail.com. A Master Gardener volunteer will research and get back to you with a science based answer.

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