

Quick Guide: Spring Blooms!

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Quick Tips

- Remove last year's mulch and expose the soil to the sun for a few days before putting down new mulch. You might decide not to mulch until you plant annuals.
- Clean out winter's bird feeders and fill them with new seeds for migrating birds. Some birds will use your yard as a way station while for others it might be their summer home.
- Trim standing stalks and stubble. Clean out old, dead leaves under shrubbery.
- Perennials are plants that return every year, having died off in the winter above ground but with their roots surviving underground. Annuals are plants that cannot survive the winter but must be planted new every year.
- Plant annuals one or two weeks after any danger of frost has passed. The earlier you plant them, the longer you will enjoy their show, although they can be planted just about anytime during the spring and even into the summer.
- Divide perennials in the spring to make several smaller plants. These include familiar favorite such as day lilies and hostas.



The Spring Garden

Don't wait for the weather to turn balmy to get out in the garden. It needs your attention now!

Don't let springtime's fickle nature keep you indoors. The garden needs you!

When winter releases its frosty grip, your beds need attention. It's time when you can dig in the soil, when crocuses are finished, the daffodils are blooming, and tulips show some greenery.

Bundle Up and Get to Work!

Pull on an old sweatshirt, some heavy socks and grab a good pair of gardening gloves. Load the wheelbarrow with your tools and get to work.

Begin by cutting out old stubble. This will allow you to rake accumulated leaves and debris from the garden.

Trim standing stalks and cut away twisted, broken, weak-looking, and overgrown branches from evergreens and small, garden shrubbery.

Clean up greening plants by removing most of the old leaves to allow the new to burst forth. Edge the garden beds while the soil is moist and easy to turn.

Mulch and Fertilize

When there is no danger of another frost, remove the mulch you put down last fall since it could hold bugs or fungi.

Expose the soil to sunlight for several days and then apply new mulch. This is a big job — even small garden beds need large amounts of mulch.

When the garden begins to show signs of life — also called “breaking dormancy” — it's time to fertilize.

Ask the experts at the garden center or the county agent's office what types of fertilizer are best for your plants. Some, such as azaleas and hollies, need acidic fertilizers; others need more alkaline formulations.

Spread fertilizer beneath the plant as far as the canopy of the branches. Scratch it into the soil with a garden fork or your fingers, and then water well.

Divide Perennials and Prune Shrubs

Large, established perennials should be divided. While nearly all perennials can be divided either in the spring or fall, springtime is the best for most.

Some plants should be divided only after they flower.

The following common perennials should be divided in the spring, not the fall. Depending on their configuration, use your hands, a spade, or a knife to split them into two plants:

**Bleeding hearts*

Anemone

Caladiums

Wild ginger

**Primroses*

Asters

Calla lilies

*** (Wait until they flower)*

Prune shrubbery in the early spring when you can see the barebones shape of the plant. Flowering shrubs, such as azaleas and rhododendrons, shouldn't be pruned until after they bloom.

When you prune, remove old flower heads and prune for shape and size. Cut off dead or crossed branches and any that grow at odd angles from the trunk.

Time to Plant

As soon as perennials show up in the nurseries, you can plant them outside. Dig a hole or trough to the proper depth and, once the plant is in the ground, keep the soil moist for several days or longer.

Both perennial and annual beds should be mulched to help retain moisture, regulate soil temperature, and keep weeds at bay.

Get to Know Your Garden

The garden is an organic body that changes and evolves as the weeks, months, and years go by. Any attention you give it will reward you. Well-cared-for gardens never let you down!



Spring Bird Feeders

Birds love bird feeders in the spring — and for many, they spell survival.

They're back! When springtime arrives in temperate zones, migrating birds come with it. This is a happy time for everyone who enjoys watching our feathered friends at the backyard bird feeder, the birdbath, or diligently gathering material to build their nests.

This is also when a lot of us close down our winter bird feeders, reasoning that the birds can fend for themselves as the weather improves.

While this is true — after all, birds have been flying back and forth from north to south and south to north for centuries — many do better with springtime bird feeding.

Migration is Hard Work!

These little creatures have flown many miles. Your backyard may be their destination or may only be a way station. Either way, birds welcome birdseed and suet.

They arrive at your birdfeeder hungry and tired. Spring is a fickle season; there's no guarantee there will be enough insects for robust avian health. It may snow in early spring, and certainly most regions can expect long days of rain.

These factors mean arriving migratory birds can use some extra nourishment. Your birdfeeder is a welcome landing place.

Clean Feeders, Clean Seed

Bird feeders benefit from spring cleaning. Use a brush and warm, soapy water for wooden feeders and a mild bleach solution for plastic ones. Rinse them very well and then let them dry thoroughly in the spring sunshine or wipe them with a clean cloth.

Now is also the time to clean out birdhouses and birdbaths. Remember not to use bleach or any other harsh cleanser with wood structures. Stone and plastic do fine with mild solutions of bleach as long as they are well rinsed.

Fill the feeders with clean, fresh birdseed. Your winter stash may be damp or moldy.

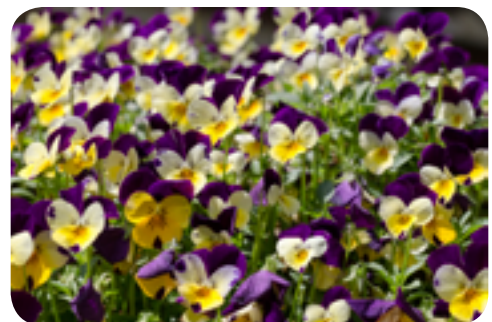
While a general mixture of seed does very well for most birds, the songbirds returning to your feeders now like black oil sunflower seeds. Look for mixtures with an abundance of these.

Don't forget about the humming birds and orioles, who sup on sweet syrups. And remember that suet is an excellent source of energy during the spring when migratory birds tend to be stressed. It's a good idea to offer it for a month or two after they return.

Home Sweet Home

Many of the birds who find a nutritious welcome in your backyard will become regular guests, returning each year. This is true of those who are only passing through on their journey north as well as those who live in your microclimate all summer long.

Those birds raise their young near your feeder and these babies will grow up to think of your yard and its environs as home. And so, as the years go by, your feeders will be popular and well populated destinations for all sorts of colorful and full-throated birds.





10 Common Gardening Terms and What They Mean

Never again feel like a novice at the garden center!

Every discipline has its own lingo and gardening is no different. While gardeners are a friendly bunch, many beginners are daunted by the terms they hear tossed around by veterans and may be hesitant to ask for a definition.

Let us come to the rescue! Here is a list of 10 commonly used terms that will make you sound more knowledgeable than you might feel you are. Even better, once you understand these, you will be a better gardener.

1. **Annual:** An annual is a plant that lives and dies in one season. It will not reappear next year, but during its growth cycle in your garden it will flower, set seeds, and multiply.
2. **Bedding plant:** These are plants that generally are planted in masses purely for show. Very often — but not always — bedding plants are annuals, which bloom all summer.
3. **Compost:** The term refers to organic matter (leaves, grass clippings, twigs, kitchen refuse) that has decomposed and become soft and textured. Compost is used to amend the soil so that it's richer, healthier, and better able to hold moisture.

4. **Deadhead:** Plants with multiple blooms need to be deadheaded, which means dying flowers are plucked from the plant. This makes the plant look better and also encourages more abundant flowering.
5. **Division:** Splitting perennials apart to make several smaller plants is called dividing. It's important because it revitalizes plants even as it helps you fill out your beds and control plant sizes.
6. **Mulch:** Material that covers the soil and holds in moisture and warmth even as it discourages weed growth is called mulch. Mulch may be made of organic or inorganic material. Most gardeners buy it in large sacks at garden centers; others get large amounts delivered.
7. **Perennial:** These flowering plants return to the garden year after year. They die off in the frost but their roots survive the winter and put up new shoots in the spring.
8. **Rootbound:** This is the condition potted plants develop when they are confined to a pot for too long and their roots, which have nowhere to go, wrap around the rootball in the bottom of the pot. Rootbound, or potbound, plants should be transplanted to a larger pot or the earth.
9. **Variegated:** Foliage that is streaked or blotched with more than one hue is referred to as variegated. The leaves are often mixtures of green, yellow, white, and cream. Many gardeners are crazier about these striations than blooms.
10. **Volunteer:** In the garden a volunteer is a plant that grows where it has not been planted. This difference between a volunteer and a weed is that the volunteer started as the seed of one of the flowers or veggies you planted. These self-sowed plants often don't appear until the next season.



When to Plant Annuals

Most of us can't wait to get these bright, pretty blooms into the ground!

When the spring sunshine warms the back of their necks, gardeners can hardly wait to get outside and plant, plant, plant! It's that invigorating time of year when we put on our old clothes and dig in the dirt, turning it over and loosening it to welcome this year's flowers and vegetables.

Annuals for the Garden

Annuals are popular with homeowners. They boast have showy blooms and stunning greenery and last from spring until autumn. Perhaps best of all, most require very little care. These charmers include petunias, impatiens, marigolds and zinnias, all with colorful flowers.

The annuals prized for their foliage include coleus, Joseph's coat or calico plant, caladium, dusty miller and a wide range of ornamental grasses.

Garden centers are filled with a brilliant patchwork of colorful annuals in six- or twelve-packs, ready to be planted in gardens, pots, along borders, and edging walkways and driveways. Tempting!

When to Plant Annuals

There is no absolute best time to plant annuals. They will thrive anytime they are planted as long as there is no danger of frost and freezing temperatures.

Most gardeners plant annuals a week or two after the danger of frost has passed. Depending on where you live, this means they should be planted from mid to late spring. As a rule, a little early is better than a little late to get the full benefit of their riotous show.

If you find that the weather prevents you from planting the annuals soon after you buy them, don't bring them indoors. Instead, keep them in a sunny, sheltered, outdoor spot, water them well to keep them moist, and if the nights threaten to be cold, haul them into the garage.

Choose annuals for healthy looking foliage rather than lots of blooms — these will come as the plants establish themselves. Put them in the ground to the depth of the pots they come in and keep them moist until they're established.

There is no arguing that annuals fill out even the most groomed and attended garden with bright colors and gentle textures. Most gardeners plant them in the spring, but they remain in garden centers to serve as mid-summer fill-ins when the heat of July and August may cause some gardens to have "dead zones" in need of a little help.

Think carefully about the annuals you will plant and enjoy the garden even more.

