



“From the Potting Shed”

Riverview Garden Club - Helpful Hints

April 2026

April is National Gardening Month! It's time to finally get outdoors and prepare our gardens for new life. Here are some garden chores and tips to ensure a great growing season full of bountiful crops and beautiful blooms.

Things to do in the garden this month...

In the Flower Garden

Add Spring Perennials

Visit garden centers and nurseries now to see what you can find that's flowering. Options include breathtaking beauties like bleeding heart, primroses, basket of gold and candytuft. Consider ephemerals, plants that paint spring landscapes with pretty blossoms and disappear with summer's arrival. Many spring ephemerals are native wildflowers that provide good food sources for pollinators. Options include Virginia bluebells, shooting star, mayapple and trillium.

Fertilize Roses

Feed roses as spring growth is kicking into gear. Top-dress beds with a slow-release fertilizer, scratching it gently into soil, or add a 2- to 3-inch-thick layer of compost. Follow label instructions for whatever plant food you're using. Typically, a liquid rose fertilizer will instruct applying every two weeks until August. A slow-release fertilizer might require adding to soil every six weeks until August. Some rose fertilizers include a pesticide to help defeat common rose pests like Japanese beetles. Read the label carefully, because these products often harm beneficial insects and pollinators.

Plant Summer Bulbs

Plan for stunning summer color by using tender summer-flowering bulbs to fill in bare spots in the garden. Good candidates include [dahlia](#), [calla lily](#), [canna](#) and [gladiolus](#). All of these bulbs come in a host of blossom colors, and dahlias also offer striking flower forms. Canna and also [caladium](#) add color through boldly tinted leaves. Insert stakes for tall dahlias at planting time to avoid spearing tubers by adding stakes later. In cold regions, wait to plant until all danger of frost has passed.

Use Your Compost

If you use a compost tumbler system, you probably have finished compost that's ready to go. If you maintain a traditional pile and didn't harvest finished compost last fall or garden in a warmer region, check for finished compost now. Compost makes a great addition to planting beds and vegetable gardens. It's also a terrific top dressing or surface mulch around roses, clematis and cane berries.

Refresh Mulch

Mulch planting beds and vegetable gardens once the soil has warmed in spring. Add a fresh layer that's 2 to 3 inches thick. Use the 3-inch layer in warmer regions, where organic mulch breaks down faster and soil needs a cozier blanket to help retain moisture. Select an organic material, and you'll be nourishing — and even building — soil as the mulch decomposes. Good choices include ground bark, pine straw, forest bark fines and a host of other regionally available materials. Check with your local extension office to learn what types of local organic mulches are readily available where you live.

Watch for Aphids

These pesky pests thrive in cooler weather. Watch for them on lush new growth of plants, including roses, chives, kale and pansies. Traditional control methods include using a spray of water to knock them off plants or spraying with insecticidal soap or neem oil. It also helps to have a landscape that attracts insect-eating birds, like Carolina wrens, house wrens or chickadees.

In the Vegetable Garden

Rotate Crops

Crop rotation is important in the vegetable garden, and even more so following a year with disease or severe pest problems. The idea with crop rotation is that you don't grow plants in the same plant family in the same spot year after year. You can easily find information about which plants are related online. One example is the nightshade family, which includes tomato, pepper, potato, tomatillo and eggplant. Another example is the brassica family, which includes cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale, broccoli and cauliflower.

Plant Cool Season Veggies

Cool-season vegetables thrive in spring's sunny days and chilly nights. As soon as you see transplants for sale, tuck cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale, and broccoli into the soil — either in the garden or containers. Seedlings jump-start the process, or you can sow seeds. Lettuce, spinach, radish and beets grow quickly from seed. Use bird netting to protect plants from nibbling deer or rabbits. All of these crops tolerate late spring frosts so can go in the ground as early as two weeks before the last average frost.

Plant Warm-Season Edibles When Temps Allow

Wait until all danger of frost has passed to plant warm-season edibles, including summer squash, tomato, pepper and eggplant. Soil needs to be at least 60° F for success with heat-loving crops like corn, cucumber, melon, green beans, zinnia and sunflower. Check average soil temperatures online. Typically, soil reaches this temperature two weeks after the last average frost date.

Tend Perennial Herbs

Remove any protective mulch from overwintered perennial herbs like thyme, rosemary, oregano or sage. Snip old stems, cutting them back to shape the plant and encourage new growth. If plants like sage show new growth, cut stems back to a sprout. If you have a problem with critters burrowing beneath decking or sheds, shove sage or rosemary stems into any holes as a deterrent until you can fill them in.

Care for Shrubs

Prune Spring Shrubs After They Bloom

Wait to prune early spring-flowering shrubs like forsythia, star magnolia, Russian almond, witch hazel or flowering quince until after they bloom. Prune within the first month after blossoms fall, or you risk removing next year's flower buds. The exception is removing dead or damaged stems — it's OK to clip those before flowering. Visit nurseries in spring to find other early-season bloomers you might want to add to your garden.

Prune Summer Blooming Shrubs

Early spring is the time to prune summer-flowering shrubs, ones that bloom after June 1. Northern gardeners who often experience hard freezes in March should do it now. The list includes butterfly bush, rose of Sharon, blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris*) and summer sweet. Clip stems back by one-third to control height and still keep the shrub looking natural. Place cuts just above a bud to encourage branching.

Care for the Lawn

Tune Up the Mower

Service your lawn mower by changing the oil and spark plug and adding fresh fuel. It's also a good idea to sharpen the mower blade and remove dried grass on guards or mower decks. On chilly spring days, if your pull-start mower is tough to turn over, set the mower in the sun an hour or two before you plan to mow. Cover the engine with a black plastic trash bag. The bag will absorb the sun's heat, warming up the motor. It should rev easier when it's time to mow.

Aerate the Lawn

There are two times of year that you can aerate the lawn: spring and fall. When you do it depends on where you live and the type of grass you have. Warm-season grasses are aerated in late spring to early summer. Cool-season grasses are best aerated in fall. Typically, you want to aerate your lawn every two or three years to help reduce compaction and remove thatch. Rent a machine that removes plugs of soil, or hire a lawn service to do it.

Edge Your Beds

Clearly defined bed edges set off planting beds, giving them a finished, professional look. With the simple investment of some elbow grease, you can dig deep trench edging that's easy to maintain and mow. Tackle this task in early spring, when soil is moist from rains and air temperatures are cooler for hard work. Don't fill up your trench with mulch so it's level with turf. It should gently slope down from the plantings to the lawn. You want a clean-cut edge on the grass side so that turf roots are exposed to air and unable to grow into the bed.

Get a Jump on Grubs

Lawn grubs start feeding as soil warms, migrating from their underground winter quarters up into the grass root zone area. This is where they'll munch through turf roots until they're ready to molt into beetles. Check with your local garden center or extension office to learn what treatments are effective against grubs at this stage of development. Also get advice on what to do for summer grubs, a life stage that's easier to treat.

Happy Spring Gardening!

Resource:

HGTV Magazine, "April Gardening To-Do List", Julie Martens Forney, March 12, 2026.