

A GARDEN CALENDAR FOR SPRING

• Trim the gardening budget by growing from seed. Old-fashioned annuals like calendula, stocks, *Dianthus*, *Lavatera*, snapdragons, sweet peas, larkspur and cosmos offer maximum nectar and pollen for beneficial insects. Perennials are satisfying to cultivate and economical: try *Centaurea*, *Delphinium*, *Echinacea*, *Echinops*, *Eryngium*, *Lobelia*, *Penstemon*, *Salvia*, *Verbena bonariensis* and lavender.

• Ideal for edging or containers and attractive to pollinators are *Schizanthus*, alyssum, *Ageratum*, *Clarkia*, *Godetia*. Ditto for evening-scented stocks (*Matthiola bicornis*). Sow these sparingly in little pots when weather warms; when 5 to 7.5 cm (2 to 3 in.) tall, tuck clumps into corners of showily planted containers situated where you linger on summer evenings. Unremarkable in the daytime, they're heavenly scented after dark.

• As weather and soil warm slightly March through to June (depending on your area), plant mizuna, bok choy, tatsoi, giant red mustard, other Asian greens, arugula, mache, kale. Start lettuce in a cool greenhouse or cold frame. According to Irish folklore, cabbage you seed while wearing your nightclothes on St. Patrick's Day thrives. Follow with broccoli, broccoli raab (rapini), endive, leeks, more lettuce, scallions, peas, potatoes, radishes, spinach and turnips.

• If you have a heated greenhouse, sow tomatoes mid March on the Coast.

• Plant loads of herbs you use most — parsley, chives, oregano, sage and rosemary.

• Increase woody herb stock by taking cuttings late March in warmer zones — lavender, thyme and rosemary root easily. Use gritty, fast-draining soil mix: try 2 parts sterilized potting soil to 1 part each coarse sand and perlite, barely moistened. Plant six to eight 7.5-cm (3-in.) cuttings per clean 4-inch plastic pot. Carefully remove all but a few top leaves and bury the cuttings halfway, tamping the soil lightly. Cover with a plastic bag and secure with elastic. Place in a sheltered location; bottom heat speeds rooting.

• In the fourth week of April start a few zucchini seeds — F1 types. (Wait until May to sow 'Lemon Gem', other cukes, squash, pumpkins.)

• The soil needs to warm — usually late April — for beets and chard. Space the seed 5 cm (2 in.) apart. Thinning tip: following package/catalogue

directions, carefully transplant excess seedlings to another spot and water in well.

• Carrots planted in cold soil don't do well and may not form roots — late April is usually okay on the Coast. Ensure no fresh manure or compost was added to the carrot bed lest roots become misshapen, forked or hairy. If soil is cold, prep the carrot bed by digging in complete organic fertilizer; add sand if necessary. Go for fine soil tilth, removing rocks, debris. Carrot seeds are small and finicky — plant when you're unhurried, or use a seed-spacer. Cover with 0.5 cm (¼ in.) of fine soil and press down well. (Tip: place a board on the row and lightly press or step on it.) Keep the area moist with frequent fine sprinkling until germination is noted. Or try sowing seed, evenly spaced, in 4-inch pots, then transplanting the entire clump into a pre-dug hole when the soil has warmed.

• Start tomatoes early April indoors or in a cool greenhouse. Bottom heat hastens germination. Tomatoes need good ventilation and moderate heat; consider shade cloth for the greenhouse for warmer months.

• Choose a cloudy day or early morning for transplanting. If it's suddenly sunny, shade seedlings with upside-down baskets, newspaper tents or a beach umbrella for the first day.

• Rule of thumb for plant height relative to the size of garden beds: a 1.8-m-wide (6-ft.) bed looks best when the tallest plants (in the middle or towards the back, depending on the situation) are 0.9 m (3 ft.) tall.

• Fertilize cedar and other hedges in April but go easy. More food equals faster growth and frequent pruning.

• Red lettuce is hot! Try 'Red Buttersworth', 'Revelation', 'Cardinale', 'Merlot', 'Lolla Rossa', 'Redina' and more! Tuck them into planters and in chartreuse/yellow flower borders for edible art. For tender, crisp leaves, lettuce must grow quickly, so water well and feed regularly.

• Snip or pinch sweet peas when they're 10 to 12.5 cm (4 to 5 in.) tall for multi-stemmed plants with oodles of fragrant blooms.

— Sharon Hanna

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Contained BEAUTY

WHAT BETTER EXPRESSES THE JOY of spring than a container spilling over with a vibrant mix of flowers? The pond-side patterned granite container in earth tones makes a fitting contrast to the gaiety of the blooms. This design would work just as well placed at an entrance or nestled into a rock garden.

Perennial *Arabis* Pink Sequins™ (rock cress) covers the base with its woolly, grey, evergreen leaves, while its pink flowers tend to trail. Hardy to zone 3, it finishes blooming in spring and is the only plant in this container that requires deadheading. Topping the arrangement are purple *Erysimum* 'Winter Joy' (zone 6) and *Primula* Chic™ in Pink (zone 3), both of which will bloom spring into summer. Finish off with a few *Viola* 'Etain' (zone 4); its lemon-yellow flowers with a lavender margin add a bright note that carries right on into fall.

Site in partial sun, water regularly and enjoy the ever-changing transition of colour across three seasons.

— Cindy Wu

