

**GARDENING LETTERS**

by Doug Green

April showers ... and all that sort of stuff. Now here we go to the garden in earnest this month. It's a good month to clean up the flower beds; dig the annual beds and rake up any debris that you missed in the fall.

One of the easiest mistakes that a gardener can make is to try to work the soil in the garden too soon. If you have a clay soil, working it too soon only makes it form into big chunks and harden in lumps. Not good for soil structure and garden yields. Wait for working the soil until you can squeeze a handful and not have water seep out of your hand in tiny rivers. In our neighbourhood, we have a very sandy soil so this is not a problem, as soon as the roto tiller won't bog down we can work the soil.

April is a good month to make your raised beds. I have a VHS tape of a gardener making a raised bed and it demonstrates the process very well. Interested individuals are welcome to borrow this tape from the Rideau Library system where it currently resides on permanent loan. I recommend this system for general gardening.

Another gardening technique which we will be using this year is the container gardening system. We will be planting

our herb plants into 2 gallon plastic pots and then sinking these pots into a raised bed of sawdust. It's an easy way to hold back the weeds, and maintain herbs without having them crawl all over the place. Sinking the pots will also conserve water.

I saw this done successfully over at Evergreen Farm, the home of Larry and Anstace Esmonde-White of "From a Country Garden" TV fame. If you are interested in seeing their gardens, (well worth the trip) they are in Kemptville and are 'at home' on Saturdays to show off their latest projects. I recommend a visit. Anstace has also written a book on vegetable gardening which is quite good for the beginning gardener.

Perennial flowers can be planted towards the end of the month once the ground has thawed. We do a lot of work with our own perennials once the ground thaws. Remember the ground rule, if it blooms in the fall - divide in the spring; if it blooms in the spring - divide in the fall. You can increase your summer and fall bloomers as soon as you can dig them up. Go for it. Your fall mums should really be dug up every second year and the centre part discarded. The strong shoots surrounding it can be broken off the centre core and replanted. You will get more mums than you know what to do with if you follow these directions.

Watch for the ads from your local garden centres towards the end of the month. Normally most of the local greenhouses have an open house to introduce you to their new plants and show off the crop. It's worth a trip to see them all on the same day (a good Sunday drive) and find out the new crops and supplies.

I have found a very reliable way of telling when to plant gladiola bulbs. When you see the farmers planting their corn, start planting your glads. I plant mine every week for about one month following the first planting. (about 1st week May) This gives me a succession of blooms for most of the summer. I dig a furrow about 4 inches deep and set the corms into this trench. As the shoot comes out of the ground, we hoe soil up around the neck for about another 4 inches. We do this in stages as the glad grows. This keeps the plant growing straight and reduces the number of crooked stems which we get to pick. The shallow planting depth ensures warm soil which allows the corm to grow quickly in the early spring. Many gardening books tell you to carefully plant the corm so the root end is facing down or else you will not have flowers. In our operation, we do not really worry about this (with 2500 glads, we do not have the time) and frankly it has

not seemed to make that much difference. I guess if you only have a few, it makes good sense but with any large number it is not critical.

One final comment regarding planting - every year in May people try to rush the season and get the first fruit. It's OK if you know that you are rushing the season but generally speaking it's not safe to plant until after the 17th of May. I'll probably say this again in my May article but in case I don't, you've been warned.

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