



by Peggy Koppmann

I've been thinking about baking. You just preset the oven and it presents you with the perfect temperature, just the right conditions for your recipe. I want to preset my garden for perfect growing temperatures. My favorite recipe would include sunshine – and shade where needed, no late frost surprises, no critters, thriving plants, plenty of pollinators, and, while we're at it – no weeds. Now where did I put that recipe for May???

Seedling Survival – You planted those seeds yourself, nurtured the seedlings till planting time and now you have planted your “babies” in the garden. The next morning, they are cut down and lying on the soil. You have been visited by cutworms in the night. Prevention included removing weeds and plant debris that shelter the larvae, waiting as late as possible to put out seedling starts to outwait the cutworm season, and the classic cardboard collars, (milk cartons or paper cups with the bottom cut out), put out to protect your plants. Anchor the collars in at least an inch or two of soil. Other suggestions include planting sunflowers along the edge of your garden to attract the larvae so you can handpick them after dark. Beneficial nematodes and diatomaceous earth are also thought to be deterrents.

Lilac Love – Cut lilacs early in the morning on long stems when the flower is only half open. Cut the stems a second time indoors and make a vertical slit up the woody

tissue before putting in a vase. Some sources recommend lightly pounding the stems to loosen the fibers and improve water uptake.

Lilacs are a staple of spring in this area and will do best on hillsides or on level ground with good drainage; they do not like wet feet. Give them a top dressing of compost worked into the soil to help retain water. Fertilize with a high Phosphorus formula in early spring; too much nitrogen in the soil may cause poor blooming. For inspiration, not to mention that delicious fragrance in the air, visit the Rochester Lilac Festival from May 10 -18.



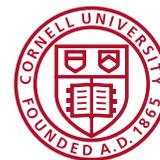
May Rules – Early May rules: plant lettuce, spinach, peas, bean, root crops, cole crops, early sweet corn. Mid-May rules: tuberous begonias, cannas, dahlias. Late May rules: plant peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, marigolds, zinnias, cucumbers. Just keep in mind, the weather trumps all May Rules with late frosts.

Avoiding Temptation – Local nurseries are full of perennials and colorful annuals that feed our buying habit: “I don't know where, but I'll find a place to put it”. Remember, the main color of any garden is green, a cool color, so look for plants that are color compatible, including blue and purple shades. Cool colors are more relaxing to the eye and are useful in areas where you sit or have a meal, and to create a sense of distance in a small garden. Bright colors from the “hot” side of the spectrum include reds, yellows and oranges. Use them sparingly to call attention to doorways, a distant focal point, or to focus attention on an area. Too many bright colors may be a distraction to the eye. Remember to repeat one or two colors throughout the garden to create a feeling of cohesion.

Garden Companions – Check out the article on Companion Planting on cce.cornell.edu/Chemung for suggestions on testing plant combinations that may confuse plant

pests. Ex. Cole crops with dill, celery, sage and rosemary; beans with Summer Savory; parsley and asparagus; radishes and lettuce. Avoid these combinations: tomatoes and cole crops; cucumbers and aromatic herbs; beans and onion family members. Experiment to find combinations that “play well with each other”.

And Then - Harden off warm-season transplants; harvest asparagus, rhubarb, green onions, lettuce and radishes; put up hummingbird feeders; finish dividing perennials; stake tall perennials; weed; repot houseplants; pinch back mums, asters, tall sedums; clean out the forget-me-nots or regret it next year; keep a watch for red lily leaf beetles; tie rambling roses to horizontal to increase flowering; buy flowers for mom; weed; shop at local nurseries; weed some more. 



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