

This Month in the Garden

by Peggy Koppmann

May! We've been waiting for you. Just when we thought we could last no longer, the calendar page turns and you finally appear. You bring us hope of sunshine and green, growing things, and warming temperatures. We're overcome with joy and have an excuse to go buy plants. As if we needed one.

Soil Temperature is the big factor this month. As the soil warms up to about 60 degrees, you can sow beans, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots and cauliflower. They will still have to be protected from frost. Wait till soil temperatures have reached 70 degrees before planning tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, cucumbers, squash, corn and melons. Planting too early in cold soil can lead to poor growth and disease. Invest in a soil thermometer and do your research to find the optimum temperature range for your seeds.



Worth Remembering – Since mowing season will be upon us, here's a reminder to keep your lawn height at 3 inches or higher. Mowing too short means your lawn has a smaller, weaker root system. Lawns mowed at the correct height are less vulnerable to drought, insects and weeds. Cornell recommends that you remove no more than 1/3 of the grass blade height at each cutting. Mulch your grass clippings so you can leave them on the lawn. Keep your lawn mower blades sharp to avoid tearing the grass.

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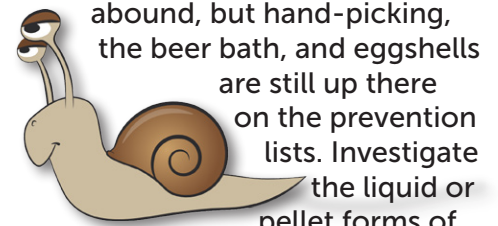


Chelsea Chop – Our British gardening cousins traditionally wait till late May, when the Chelsea flower show is over, and then whack back early bloomers such as Pulmonaria, Brunnera, and Bergennias that have just finished blooming. Plants such as asters, Helenium, Eupatorium, Rudbeckia, Echinacea, sedums and Campanula can also be "chopped", resulting in plants that are more compact and bushier. Obviously, don't mess with anything that wants to bloom in June. See DiSabato-Aust's must-have reference,

VS.

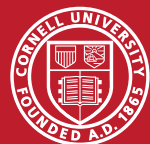
The Well-Tended Perennial Garden, for detailed information on cutting back to control size & bloom period.

War Games – It's time to wage war on slugs and snails. They love tulips and tender, young delphiniums – and, of course – hostas. Slugs don't have teeth so they rasp vegetation rather than chew it. They are nocturnal and hide under flower pots, stones, leaves, and can squeeze through the tiniest of holes as they have no skeleton. Slug solutions



abound, but hand-picking, the beer bath, and eggshells are still up there on the prevention lists. Investigate the liquid or pellet forms of slug repellent or a biological control such as nematodes.

And – Keep your plant tags; plant pansies, snapdragons, and sweet alyssum early in the month; watch for signs of Lily leaf beetles; divide up perennials; check apple, cherry, and other fruit trees for tent caterpillars; transplant cabbage and kale; clean hummingbird feeders; protect newly transplanted vegetables with cutworm collars; turn the compost pile; use antibacterial wipes to clean pruners between jobs.



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