

April in the Garden
By Tina Will

Lovely but Early!

Too early, it seems to me, that trees and Spring flowering shrubs were leafing and flowering in mid-March, and makes me wonder if we'll see the back side of Winter sometime in April. I am often doubtful of the usual frost date guidance for the same reason. But it's Spring, and the beauty is welcome and almost overwhelming. Cossey Botanical Park has many flowering shrubs and trees: Redbuds, Pearl Bush, and Spirea were already getting ready to flower in late March, but are still lovely. Many more can be enjoyed soon. Go take a walk in the Park!

Soil temps need to rise into the 50's before we plant too many edibles, and they won't really do that until the Sun is higher in the sky. Cool weather vegetable crops will have been started by many of us, and they will do fine, but others should wait as protected seedlings for a bit longer. Row covers or cloches will also protect tender vegetables. Berry crops can be planted. Cage peonies before they get too tall.

What can be done now is to incorporate a layer of compost around shrubs and trees. Soil tests may indicate adequate fertility, but shrubs or trees may still show nutrient deficiencies. Adding organic matter increases the population of microorganisms in the soil, promotes the growth of healthy mycorrhizae (fungus), and helps make nutrients available to the plant roots.

Lawns should have been fertilized in the Autumn season to nourish and strengthen roots. Spring applications of Nitrogen (for growth) are hard for many of us to resist, so if you are in the camp of 'It's Spring! I have to do something,' please reevaluate the condition of your lawn and put down just one-half of what the product label might recommend. Fertilizing lawns only in the Autumn season is now what is recommended: support root growth for stronger Spring growth and reduce by half the amount of potential Nitrogen run-off that ends up in our waterways.

Plant Clinics

The Route 3/Gordon Rd Plant Clinic will be restarting the last Saturday in April. Start dates for all of our Plant Clinic locations will be posted on <https://www.mgacra.org/plant-clinics--gardens.html>, and MGACRA Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MGACRA>.

Missed it?

Our Spring Symposium (April 13 at Belmont) has a deadline to register by **April 4**. Bryce Lane, Jennifer Rose Carey, and Leonard Githinji will speak on growing food and flowers, and doing it sustainably. It's always a wonderful day of learning in a beautiful setting. If there's room, even a late registration is worth submitting. Find registration and payment information at: <https://www.mgacra.org/2024-spring-symposium.html>.

FxbgParksandRec

Master Gardeners are offering classes once a month through Fredericksburg Parks and Rec for the May to August session. They are listed in the <https://secure.rec1.com/VA/fredericksburg-va/catalog> under Nature/MGACRA programs. May 11 is a Tree and Shrub Tour through Cossey Park at 1601

Kenmore Avenue. June 15 at DHCC: Insects: Pests, Friends, and More. July 13 at DHCC Fairy Gardens (fee \$10). August 10 at DHCC: Fall/Winter Garden Prep.