

AFTER A COLD, WET SPRING... it's time to get planting!

By TS Targos, CORRESPONDENT

It has been a long, cold, raw spring and your garden's looking pretty sorry. Because the weather was so bad in April and early May, many frustrated gardeners haven't had a chance to get out there and get their hands dirty.

All winter they have been dreaming of the day they would be elbow deep in fertilizer and garden tools and now they're thinking: Is it too late to begin spring planting?

The good news is, don't worry... there is still time.

In fact, according to Jeanna Jackson at Breezy Hill Nursery in Salem, the best time for planting is in May and June.

"In April, people are very eager to get into the dirt and plant," Jackson explains. "But it's still too early for us in the northern Midwest as we will usually get a frost in April. The truth is that we have a very short window for planting, and this year's cold, wet weather has made that window even shorter."

Personally, Jackson prefers to plant in June than later in the summer or the fall. "You can put the plant in ground and then have a whole growing season for it to get fully acclimated and put down some good root structure."

Jackson adds that while the period

between July and September is perfectly acceptable to do planting, but "often other things get in your way. In the summer, you get can busy with vacations, travel and other fun things...you may not have as much time to dedicate to the care and watering that newer plants often require."

Re-starting your garden, building a foundation

Before getting started on gardening or a landscaping project, Kate Jerome, lead Horticulture Instructor at Gateway Technical College recommends taking stock, look around and get the to know the area.

First, note any problems that you see. Then, instead of trying to fix all the garden's problems, try focusing on the areas that are most important to you and your family – maybe a patio area or a front lawn. Finally, determine the changes and improvements that you want to make.

If you find that you need to do extensive replanting in an area, you can still do it affordably. Breezy Hills' Jackson points out that making a big change in the garden does not need to cost a lot – it just takes a planned approach.

No matter how much money you have

to spend, both Jackson and Jerome suggest establishing a foundation for the garden and creating a structure to build on.

Stages:

- you can start by removing weeds and over-growth, and then add compost to enrich the soil. Jackson recommends blending in some mushroom compost to the dirt;
- to create an initial structure, put in a few perennial plants that are appropriate for the area. For example, in shady areas your selection will depend on whether the soil is dry or wet. (Jackson advises consulting with a nursery or college extension office on the best options);
- if you have a plant that you really like, but you find it does not grow well in a certain spot, simply trying moving to a different spot;
- if you have a perennial, like a day lily or hosta, that is getting too overgrown and crowded in its space, the spring is an ideal time to split it and replant part of it elsewhere;
- consider filling out an area and adding color with some annual plants;
- spread mulch around trees and in flowerbeds to prevent weeds and maintain soil moisture. Jerome recommends a 4-inch

layer of course bark chips around trees and a 2-inch layer of cocoa beans or fresh straw around perennials.

As for maintenance, you should also consider the type of fertilizer or pesticides you plan to use. Jerome points out that many customers these days are choosing sustainable alternatives over the chemical treatments.

Some are looking to employ more environmentally safe practices, but most often these customers are interested in organic alternatives as a protection measure. They may have children or pets or perhaps live near a lake that requires the use of non-phosphorous fertilizers.

What's new for gardens

According to Jackson, "this year, it's really less about new varieties but improvements and new options among existing varieties." Among the new options:

Bloomerangs – A new variety of lilac that will first bloom in the spring, then takes a break, and then after the heat of summer is over, will re-bloom in the fall.

New Colors of Coneflowers – This native plant, very hardy for our area and is commonly seen in purple, has been hybridized to create varieties in "nearly



TS TARGOS *Stateline Breeze*

It's always fun to incorporate new plants and colors into your garden. This year there are new colors of coneflowers, a hearty native plant that comes in almost every color of the rainbow. Jeanna Jackson stocks Coneflowers at Breezy Hill Nursery in Salem. Jackson is equally knowledgeable about rain barrels a new, old way of catching fresh water and reusing it.

every color of the rainbow" with names like tomato soup, hot papaya and coconut lime.

Autumn Blaze Maple trees – This is a transition variety that combines the desirable features of a silver maple (hardiness, fast growing, lower maintenance) and the great color and sturdiness of red maple trees. Also, as this hybrid maple is nearly fruitless few seeds drop from the tree – addressing one of the messier traits of a silver maple.



Consider Sustainable Practices in the Lawn and Garden

By TS Targos
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Sustainable or organic gardening is a way to grow and care for plants and lawns that can help protect the environment and cut down exposure of people, pets and the landscape to chemicals.

According to Gateway Technical College horticulturalist, Kate Jerome, using sustainable practices does not mean letting your lawn and garden "go to prairie" nor is it a "quick fix" to weed and bug problems. Instead it is the subtle manipulation of the soil in the garden and landscape.

"What you are try to achieve is a natural balance in the soil so that there is little or no need to apply chemical fertilizer or pesticides."

Jerome explains that adjusting to sustainable lawn and garden maintenance is a transition and will take getting used to. She provided some advice on incorporating sustainable practices perhaps before you go to Round-Up and Preen:

- use corn gluten meal (CGM) as a crabgrass preventer and an all-round fertilizer. CGM is an organic herbicide that prevents germination of crabgrass and other seeds. It also contains 10 percent nitrogen so it also acts as a natural fertilizer;
- collect rain water in a barrel. Rain barrels can help offset water supply shortages during dry periods. Did you know that 500 square feet of roof could produce 300 gallons of water in a rain barrel?
- try to feed the grass by leaving clippings after cutting. Lawn clippings are high in nitrogen making them an excellent feed. Cut the grass frequently so that clippings are smaller and more easily breakdown by the soil. According to Jerome, the best places to view sustainable gardening include the area's nature trails and any one of the area's colleges.

For more information on sustainable gardening, visit Breezy Hill Nursery (www.breezyhillnursery.com/gc-organicproducts.html) and Gateway Technical College (www.gtc.edu/sustainabilitycenter) or www.sustainable-gardening.com.