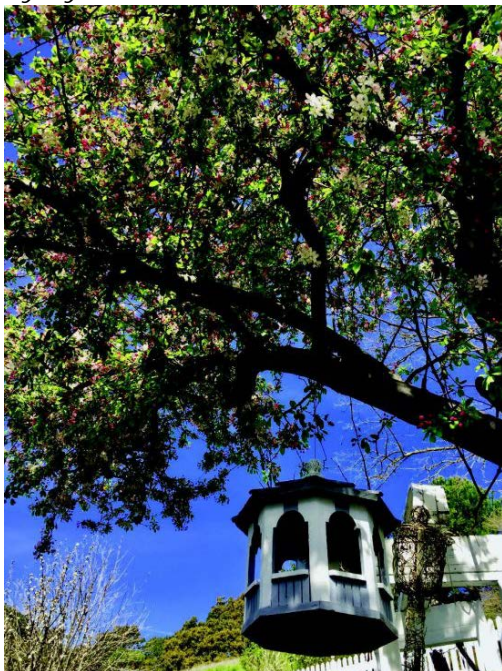


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## April Gardening Guide

By Cynthia Brian



A birdfeeder anchors a flowering crabapple tree.  
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Now every field is clothed with grass, and every tree with leaves; now the woods put forth their blossoms, and the year assumes its gay attire." ~Virgil

Yes, California passed Proposition 64 last November. However, this column is not about cultivating marijuana, although I am writing about the glories of grass.

Spring is spectacular with its wardrobe of rainbow blooms. Trees are covered with blossoms, the fragrance of freesia engages our nostrils, and the ubiquitous beauty surrounding us is awe-inspiring. We are so blessed that Mother Nature celebrates the rebirth of the seasons with a grand April entrance.

Because of the warmer soil, fall is the best time to plant or reseed a lawn, yet spring runs a close second in popularity. If you haven't torn out your swath of grass in the past few years during our dreadful drought, no doubt you are now looking at a runway of green in your yard thanks to the months of rain. To manage your efforts maintaining the health, beauty and benefits of your lawn for the remainder of the year, get started this month with simple best practices.

Tips to Growing a Lush, Green, Sustainable Turf

Decide if you want to seed, sod or reseed. Seeding for the first time is best done in autumn when the soil is warm as germination is swifter. You can successfully reseed, overseed and sod in spring, including those irksome bare patches.

Whichever you choose, your first consideration is to properly prepare your soil. Check the PH level. Ideally lawns should be in the six to seven range. If lower than six, add lime; if higher than seven, add sulfur to bring the PH down.

Pull the weeds. If you have lots of weeds, keep in mind that weeds mean that the soil conditions are imbalanced. Weeds provide homes and food for microbes but your soil must be improved before your new sod or grass seeds will thrive. Many "weeds" are actually gourmet dinner or tea ingredients including plantain, dandelion, creeping Charlie, mint, mustard, lambs quarter and more.

Order several yards of enriched soil and compost to be delivered. Ask the yard experts what is their best soil for improving your lawn. Soil is the foundation.

Add organic fertilizer to accelerate deeper rooting.

Aerate to loosen the soil. A core aerator will punch holes in the ground to bring air and water to the roots. The finger plugs are to be left on the surface to naturally decompose. Less compaction equals better drainage and absorption.

Consult your favorite nursery professional for a recommendation on the best seed combinations for you. I'm a huge fan of mixed growth lawns for year around enjoyment. I reseed with Pearl's Premium ([www.PearlsPremium.com](http://www.PearlsPremium.com)) interspersed with plugs of isotoma (blue star creeper) and white and red clover. Together they make a very attractive natural rug and the clover is a natural nitrogen supplier. Some people enjoy lawns laced with wild strawberry, violets, mint, or even planted with bulbs.

You may have to cover reseeded areas with netting to keep the birds away. For small areas, discarded window or door screens work well.

Let the rainfall do the watering to get your grass established. If it's later in the season when the rain has stopped, water deeply in the morning twice a week or as needed.

Mow your lawns with a sharp blade on a high setting without the bag allowing the cut grass to remain on the lawn. This is called grasscycling and is the most beneficial component of cultivating a lush, deep green, thick healthy lawn. If you are buying a new mower, buy a mulch mower, which will chop the grass. Grasscycling allows the clippings to be the fertilizer that provides nutrients to your grass. Scientific research indicates that the content of typical grass clippings by weight is nitrogen (N) 4 percent, potassium (P) 2 percent, and phosphorous (K) .5 percent. By recycling your grass clippings back to your lawn, you use 25 percent less additional fertilizer.

Mulch the reseeded areas to create a strong turf.

Stay off the grass while it's growing!

For those of you who are "Ex-lawn Rangers," you can create an inviting mosaic with massed groundcovers and low growers including dicentra, ajuga, creeping thyme, golden creeping Jenny, dwarf cinquefoil, or even sedum. You'll need to clip, snip, and maintain. Most groundcovers are not foot-traffic friendly. Benefits of Maintaining a Lawn

Although many people tend to discourage lawns in landscapes as a water conservation method, I am a firm believer that the humble grass shoot offers benefits to our health and wellbeing. Besides the fact that

children and animals enjoy a safe, comfortable place to tumble and toss, lawns contribute to better air quality by trapping dust and smoke particles while cooling the air from the ground up.

Our environments are made more habitable by the generation of oxygen absorbing the pollutants of carbon and sulfur dioxide. Lawns clean the air we breathe. Erosion is controlled because water can't carve deep recesses in a thickly planted lawn. Water filters through turf grass making our ground waters safer and cleaner for the environment. A patch of green soothes the eye when viewing a landscape, offering a resting space between the color explosions of flowers and shrubs. Lawns offer a buffer zone in fire prevention.

Several years ago when one of the biggest wild fires in our national history hit the forests of Northern California, our family cabin's grassy meadow became the safe zone for dozens of firefighters from around the country. That lawn literally saved lives and the forest from the raging blaze.

Prepare your grass for healthy growing this spring, and get ready for the fun-filled days of croquet, ball games, picnics, sprinkler baths, or just staring up at the clouds.

Remember that maintaining your lawn enhances the environment, improves your health, and optimizes your enjoyment of the great outdoors. And that's great grass!

Cynthia Brian's Goddess Gardener Tips for April

BEWARE of ticks. Check your body, hair, and clothing after gardening. On a rainy day in mid March when I was covered head to toe in clothing, a tick bit me on my neck. The golf ball size lump is still painful.

TURN houseplants a quarter round every week to give adequate amount of sunlight to all parts.

BAIT for snails and slugs.

VISIT the Wagner Ranch Wildlife Festival on Sunday, April 23 for free family fun. There will be honeybees, goats, turtles, birds, garden activities, food, music, nature tours, arts and crafts. 350 Camino Pablo Rd. at Bear Creek Road in Orinda. <https://fwrna.org/wildlifefest/>

PERUSE FLOWER PHOTOGRAPHY. Award winning photographer Anne Morrison Rabe's Spring Flowers exhibit is showcased now at home/made Kitchen & Bakery, 337 Rheem Boulevard in Moraga. Almost all of Anne's photographs were shot with an iphone. Eat, drink, and enjoy the art. [www.Amr-Photogrpahy.com](http://www.Amr-Photogrpahy.com)

PREORDER my forthcoming garden book, "Growing with the Goddess Gardener," Book I in the Garden Shorts Series. All pre-orders will receive extra goodies such as heirloom seeds, bookmarks, and more. Email me for details, [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com). A quarter of the proceeds benefit the 501c3 Be the Star You Are! charity.

WIN \$50,000 FOR YOUR GARDEN: As a judge in America's Best Gardener Contest. I encourage you to enter to win \$50,000. Show the world that your thumb is the greenest by showing the world pictures of your garden today! [www.americasbestgardener.com](http://www.americasbestgardener.com)



Blue star grass amidst the fallen petals of peach blossoms.



A close up look at clover as a lawn substitute.



Pearl's Premium lawn two days after mowing.



Western red bud is a gorgeous native tree with deep pink/purple blooms.



Visit home/made Kitchen & Bakery for creative digital floral photography by Anne Rabe.



Cynthia Brian in the garden.

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[back](#)

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