

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

April's potpourri of gardening tasks



Crabapple blossoms make wonderful cut flowers. Photos Cynthia Brian
By Cynthia Brian

"Spring is the time of plans and projects." ~ Leo Tolstoy, "Anna Karenina"

The first few weeks of April will indeed be days of watching, waiting, and planning our projects ... a veritable potpourri of gardening tasks. Instead of sunshine and songbirds, the first few days of spring arrived with heavy downpours and gale-force winds. Not to be discouraged, I put on my mud boots and rain gear to discover the harbingers of spring ... my hellebores. Hiding beneath a blooming azalea, I found my green and fuchsia-tinged aristocratic Lenten roses stretching upwards. If you haven't planted any hellebores in your shade garden, add them to your "must-buy" list. These perennial woodland beauties are available in a spectrum of colors including red, burgundy, yellow, green, pink, ivory and lime. Some varieties are even almost black. They are evergreen, deer and vole resistant, and provide long-lived blooms throughout spring. Since hellebores survive winter frosts, they can be planted now next to ferns, hostas, or other light shade denizens.

Although the weather doesn't look or feel like spring, my garden is awake and desires to delight. The crabapple, prune, and apricot trees



Bee on viburnum blooms

boast spectacular color and the buds on the cherry trees are ready to burst open. Iris, anemone, hyacinth, and cyclamen shimmer in the morning dew, and in the next few weeks the tulips and freesia will be at their prime. Pollinators are flocking to the fragrant white viburnum and the blue rosemary. I am a proponent of planting perennials and bulbs because no matter what the season, something is always in bloom. Over the years, and for several months, I planted daffodils and narcissi bulbs on a weekly schedule. My reward is five to six months of continuous flushes of flowers from countless specimens and cross-category hybrids, including the fragrant jonquilla, doubles, and trumpets.

If you haven't already prepared your soil for spring planting, don't waste any time getting started. Add compost, leaf litter, or manure to increase the nutrients and fertility. Chop cover crops before they go to seed. They can be composted or left on the ground to decompose. This green manure will increase nitrogen, and nutrients, and improve soil structure and quality. After cutting my cover crops, I will scatter them around the landscape, then wait three weeks before planting to allow for the breakdown. If the soil is not being fed, it is feeding on itself, and that will spell disaster.

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