

What to do in the garden in April

The Ornamental Garden

- Trim evergreen shrubs such as pittosporums, euonymus and conifers to give them time to recover before winter. Some evergreens such as osmanthus, ericas and hebe may still be in flower or about to flower, so delay any trimming until after flowering.
- If choosing a new tree for autumn colour, do that while it has its leaves, for you may be disappointed if you buy once the leaves have fallen. Not all deciduous trees will have the same superb colour.
- Check conifers for dead growth and, where possible, remove this by running a gloved hand lightly over each branch and removing excess litter from the interior of the plant.
- Check deciduous plants and prune out any dead growth while you can still distinguish between dead and live wood.
- It's a good time to plant or move camellias, rhododendrons, azaleas and pieris.
- Sweet peas can still be planted, as well as spring annual seedlings such as alyssum, candytuft, cornflower, dianthus, linaria, pansy, primula, viola, aquilegia, delphinium, foxglove, nemesia, poppy, statice, sweet William and wallflowers.
- Look for liliium, hippeastrum, sprekelia and nerine bulbs at local outlets or order from specialist growers.
- Prepare a well-drained area for planting bulbs in coming months or grow them in pots. Most of the spring bulbs should be planted this month, but delay planting tulips and Dutch iris until later in the month when the soil cools.
- Remove old leaves from hellebores, winter iris and aquilegias.
- As dahlias come to the end of their season, tidy plants and remove any clumps not required for next year. Label remaining clumps with type and colour for later division.
- Reduce water to tuberous begonias and move to a frost-protected area to allow them to die down for winter.

Garden Maintenance

- Deciduous trees are dropping their leaves, a great source of compost. Add these to the compost heap, but mow or shred them first for best results. If you don't have a compost heap or bin, rake them into a corner and cover with a little soil to anchor them. They will quickly break down. Another option is to put them into a black plastic garbage bag and let them break down in the sun. They can then be used as an excellent source of mulch and nutrient for those less drought-tolerant plants which will appreciate a little TLC.
- Cover your pond with wire to prevent leaves from falling into the water. Fish will be less active so food should be reduced.

The Kitchen Garden

- Harvest the last of your crops of fruits and summer vegetables.
- Sow Asian greens, broad beans and peas. Onion seed may also be sown in a protected area or in seed boxes for planting out later in winter.
- Plant seedlings of Asian greens, peas and shallots.
- Remove three-year-old strawberries and replace with new virus-free stock, preferably in a different part of the garden. Clip foliage from remaining plants, but do not add this to the compost heap.
- Try growing your brassicas in an improvised tunnel covered with insect netting to prevent infestation by the cabbage white butterfly.
- Hang fruit fly traps for lemons and pomegranates to help reduce next year's insect numbers.
- Band fruit trees with hessian, corrugated cardboard or grease bands using Vaseline spread on pantyhose as a trap for codling moth. Remove and replace periodically, at the same time ensuring you remove and destroy any infested fruit. All mummified stone fruit should be removed, bagged and binned. Do not compost.
- If you grow herbs and other plants in pots, it's a good time to repot and replenish the potting mix, at the same time dividing perennial herbs. Larger pot plants may have the soil replenished by using a sharp tool to loosen the soil around the edges and on the surface of the pot. You can then replace the old soil around the edges with fresh potting mix and slow release fertiliser.
- Now is a great time to cultivate bare areas and plant a green manure crop. Failing that, make sure you dig in compost.
- Complete sowing and repair of lawn.
- Growth slows as the weather cools, so reduce watering.
- Remove summer and autumn annuals including vines and crop residue from the vegetable and fruit areas. Carefully dispose of any that might carry disease or insect pests, and add all clean material to the compost heap.
- Most herbaceous perennials and ground covers can be divided and tidied up.
- If you've noticed an attractive shrub or tree in your suburb and you'd like to grow one, make enquiries and get its name so that you can do some research about potential size and characteristics. Bare-rooted and deciduous plants will become available later in winter.
