

Farmer Fred - APRIL GARDEN CHORES FOR THE CENTRAL VALLEY, FOOTHILLS & BAY AREA

Make sure your sprinklers are covering the entire lawn area equally. Scatter a dozen, equally sized, flat-bottomed cans throughout the area while you water; then, measure the water in each can.

Remove and rake up faded flowers from rhododendrons, camellias and azaleas.

Start feeding houseplants on a monthly basis now through October.

Plant seeds of loose-leaf lettuce now before the weather turns hot. Save room for taller growing vegetables, such as tomatoes, to the south of the lettuce to provide summer shade.

The last weekend of April is an ideal time to plant your summer outdoor vegetable garden.

Besides the Yolo Wonder, good sweet peppers for the valley include Flamingo and Gypsy.

In search of spring flowering trees? Consider the Western and Eastern redbuds, dogwood, crabapple and flowering pear trees.

Redhumped caterpillars will soon start chewing the leaves of several varieties of trees. Look for them massed on the undersides of the foliage; clip off and discard those leaves.

Resist the urge to rototill excessively wet soil. This could compact the ground, destroying tiny air pockets necessary for plant root growth.

Looking for an easy to grow perennial? Try one of the many salvias (sage) now available.

All lawns can benefit from an application of fertilizer now. A product that contains nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium is ideal for your grass.

If plant leaves look chewed, start searching for snails. Their hiding places include damp, dark areas: under boards, flower pots and beneath the foliage of lush, green plants such as hostas and agapanthus. Safer, effective snail control products contain iron phosphate as the active ingredient.

Trim back winter freeze damage from perennials.

Freshen up your container gardens with new plantings of colorful annuals such as marigolds and petunias for sunny areas; impatiens and fushias for the shade.

Your azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias and gardenias would like to be fed this month. Use a fertilizer specially formulated for these plants.

Recent tomato taste trials in our area turned up four winning varieties: Supersteak, Better Boy, Celebrity and Ace.