

The Spring Gardener's Dispatch

Your Essential Guide to April and May in the UK Garden

As the soil warms and the days lengthen, the garden enters its most explosive period of growth. April and May are the "engine room" of the gardening year, transitioning from spring preparation to the first major planting and maintenance windows. Follow this sequential guide to stay ahead of the season.

April: The Month of Establishment

April is focused on getting the right plants into the ground and monitoring the health of emerging growth.

- **Early April:**
 - **Nutrient Check:** Observe your perennials; if foliage appears light green or yellow, it may be a temporary nutrient deficiency caused by cool soils.
 - **Soil Preparation:** If you haven't already, finish preparing **no-dig beds** by adding a 5cm (2in) layer of organic matter or garden compost to the surface.
 - **Mid-April:**
 - **Drought-Resistant Planting:** Plant any silver-leaved, less hardy sun lovers now so they can establish roots before the heat of summer arrives.
 - **Fruit Tree Care:** Water older trees slowly and deeply once if it has been a dry spring to support fruit set.
 - **Late April:**
 - **Lawn Initiation:** Begin regular weekly mowing but keep the blades on a high setting for the first two cuts to allow the grass to strengthen.
 - **Weed Suppression:** Weeds will begin to appear quickly; hoe them on a dry day to slice through stems just below the surface.
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May: The Busiest Month

May is a whirlwind of activity, with plants catching up from their slow start and the first major harvests beginning.

- **Early May:**
 - **Frost Watch:** Late frosts are common in the UK; be ready to cover tender plants and potato shoots with **horticultural fleece** if temperatures are set to drop.
 - **Hardy Herbs:** Plant out hardy herbs such as **thyme and mint**.
 - **Autumn Bulbs:** Plant autumn-flowering bulbs, including **nerines and colchicums**, in pots or borders.
- **Mid-May:**
 - **Staking Tall Perennials:** Tall growers like **delphiniums and lupins** should be staked now before they flop or are weighed down by spring rain.
 - **Sweet Pea Care:** Water and feed sweet peas regularly. Pick flowers every few days and remove seed pods to ensure a longer flowering season.

- **Rhubarb & Early Fruit:** Harvest rhubarb, being sure to remove any flower spikes at the base. Start thinning heavy crops of apples and pears (though the "June drop" will do some of the work naturally).
 - **Late May (Post-Chelsea Flower Show):**
 - **Summer Bedding:** Once the risk of frost has passed, plant out summer bedding plants.
 - **Plum Pruning:** Prune plum trees now during dry weather to reduce the risk of silver leaf fungal disease.
 - **Spring Bulb Maintenance:** Lift and divide overcrowded clumps of daffodils and other spring-flowering bulbs once they have finished their display.
 - **Potato Care:** Earth up potatoes to protect developing tubers from light and late frosts.
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Essential Maintenance Tips

- **Watering Wisely:** Aim to water **early in the morning or late in the evening** to minimise evaporation. Direct water to the roots rather than the foliage.
 - **Greenhouse Management:** On warm days, open vents and doors to improve air circulation and prevent fungal diseases like Botrytis.
 - **Pest Vigilance:** Watch out for **viburnum beetle** and **lily beetle grubs**, which start appearing this month. Wash off aphid colonies with a hose or remove them by hand before they multiply.
 - **Wildlife Balance:** Consider leaving some areas of your lawn uncut to provide a habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.
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Happy Gardening! *Keep your secateurs sharp and your hoe ready—the busiest time of the year is here!*