

Garden Club Horticultural Hints

May 2021
Everything's blooming at once!

It's tick season. Whenever you go out to garden, take a few seconds to spray all your clothing – not just below the knees, but on shirts and elsewhere – to deter ticks that want to jump on anything warm-blooded for their next meal. Use a spray that specifies it uses EPA-registered ingredients that are tick repellents. These include DEET, oil of lemon eucalyptus, and PMD. New England ticks now carry not just Lyme disease, but pathogens that destroy white blood cells (Ehrlichiosis) and red blood cells (Babesiosis).



Pinch me! Now is the time to ‘create’ shorter plants with lots of flowers instead of leggy giants. You need to **pinch back plants** like asters and chrysanthemums four times during the spring and summer. Here’s an easy mnemonic: pinch them back Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Father’s Day and the Fourth of July. With Mother’s Day this Sunday, it’s time to make your first pinch.

Pinch back perennials like this Shasta daisy to get more blooms on a better-shaped plant later this summer. Do your first pinch on Mother's Day, your second on Memorial Day.

Protect your houseplants from excessive sun and heat. Plants that grow indoors are dependent upon you to ensure they don’t get burned with the approaching summer. The May sun is intense and days are rapidly lengthening. Move houseplants away from windows with long sun exposure, and place them where fewer hours of direct light (and easterly or northern window rather than a west or south one.)

Now that sunlight is strong for much of the day, keep houseplants away from glass that might cause scorched leaves.





Native Monarda

Plant pollinators. Instead of trusting plant tags with tantalizing but often meaningless promises, there is now a wealth of information on plants available via websites – both annuals and perennials – that attract birds, bees, and butterflies (and sometimes bats). Check sites such as Grow Native Massachusetts (<https://www.grownativemass.org/Great-Resources/databases>), where you'll find links to New-England-centric resources (including Native Plant Trust's 'Go Botany' site (<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/>), an easy-to-use tool for finding out which plants match your specific needs.

Great news on the drought front. What a difference a few weeks makes! The latest Drought Monitor shows the 'moderate drought' across New England has substantially receded, as has the 'abnormally dry' conditions. The U.S. Weather Service forecast for the region indicates continued above-average precipitation. Monitor rainfall with an inexpensive rain gauge (even a tuna can will do the job) so you don't waste time or water by watering when plants don't need it.



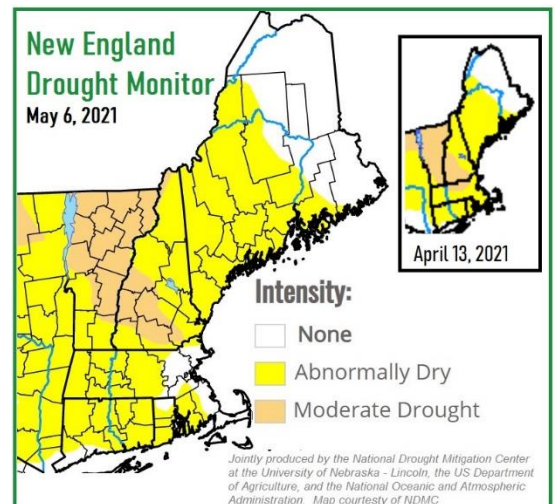
Never use your fingers to thin seedlings. Use scissors instead.

Thin your seedlings the right way. By now, vegetable seeds you planted in April have germinated, and it's time to thin your seedlings to a number that will grow, thrive, and not crowd one another. If you are tempted to pull out excess seedlings roots and all, don't do it! Instead, snip unwanted seedlings with scissors. Pulling out seedlings by their roots inevitably disturbs their neighbors. And, try not to touch your remaining seedlings as you thin them. Fungi from elsewhere in the garden can be transmitted by your fingers or gloves without you ever knowing it was there.

Dig and divide perennials. Your favorite perennials should all be up by now, but have not yet set flower buds. This is a terrific time to divide them. The plant will benefit from discarding its dead center. Use a spade to divide the perennial into sections; return the largest one to the original site, and plant the others wherever you want color and texture or donate them to your garden club's plant sale.



If it hasn't greened up by now, the center of this grass is dead. Use a spade to dig out the plant, divide it into pieces (as shown in red) and discard the dead portion of the plant. This time next year, you'll have three or four healthy, growing plants.



Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for May and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com