April in the Garden

April is a busy time in the garden. The chance of frost is minimal, the days are becoming longer and the temperature is quite pleasant. Its time to get busy in the garden.

If you want to add color to your landscape, now’s the time to plant many of our warm season annuals including celosia, coleus, dusty miller, impatiens, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental peppers, pentas, portulaca, salvia, torenia and zinnias.

One of the newer annuals is the ‘Mona Lavender’ Plectranthus. This compact plant has handsome purple-backed leaves and produces multitudes of short stalks of lavender flowers throughout most of the summer. This plant will grow in full sun to part shade. It’s visually striking when several are planted together or massed for color in a low border.

April is also a great time to plant flowering perennials. Some that will provide long lasting summer color include the cigar flower (Cupheas), plumbago, rudbeckia, the perennial salvias, stokesia and verbena.

One of our most reliable perennials is the firespike (Odontonema strictum). This perennial has an upright habit, typically growing to about 3 feet tall. Its shiny dark green leaves accent its beautiful terminal spikes of tubular red flowers. These showy flowers attract hummingbirds and several species of butterflies. Firespike is at its best in full sun. However, it is one of only a few flowering plants that give good, red color in a partially shaded site. Although firespike is tender to cold, it reliably returns in our area each spring.

April is also one of our busiest times in the vegetable garden. Bush and pole beans, cantaloupes, cucumbers, eggplant, lima beans, peppers, sweet potatoes and tomatoes are just a few vegetables that can be planted now. For those with limited space, try growing vegetables in containers. For more information on the subject refer to the UF/
April is also an appropriate time to fertilize your lawn. If you haven’t already done so, apply a slow-release fertilizer. Generally, a 15-5-15 or a 15-0-15 fertilizer is a good choice for all of our warm season grasses.

When fertilizing your lawn, remember if you spill fertilizer on the driveway or sidewalk, be sure to sweep it up and put it back in the bag or spread it on the yard. If fertilizer is not swept up, it will easily find its way down the storm drain and into the water supply.

**Tip of the Week:** Try planting that potted Easter lily outside in your landscape. Choose a sunny location in a well-drained soil that has been amended with organic matter. Good drainage is the key for success with lilies. But, don’t expect your garden planted lily to bloom next year at Easter, it will rebloom sometime in late spring. And an added note to pet owners, Easter lilies are toxic to cats.