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outdoors



thanks! – now what do I do?

On Valentine's Day, Easter, or Mother's Day, you may find yourself the recipient of a gift plant such as azalea, cyclamen, or hydrangea. A question we often hear is, "Can I plant it in my flowerbeds when it's done blooming?" Unfortunately, most florist plants are more tender than their cousins bred to survive in landscapes. It can't hurt to try—the warmer your climate, the better your chances. But don't bank on it. Instead, place your gift on a table or in a windowsill where it can serve as inspiration for the upcoming garden season.

the gardener

TOOLS & TIPS FOR EVERYONE WHO LOVES TO DIG

by ERIC LISKEY

PHOTO: BLAINE MOATS



THIS MONTH IN THE GARDEN



north Start seeds of summer vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers indoors this month. Grow them under a fluorescent light or on a windowsill in full sun.



south After the last frost, move plants you overwintered indoors, such as bougainvillea and hibiscus, back outside. Keep them in a sheltered spot for a few days to ease the transition.



west Rejuvenate groundcovers such as turf lily, vinca, and St. John's wort by mowing or cutting with a string trimmer, then raking off the trimmings.

17 million

That's how many gallons of gas are spilled during refueling of lawn equipment each year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. To reduce spillage, don't top off gas tanks when refueling lawn mowers, trimmers, and other power tools; and use a no-spill gas can.

YARD GOODS

No more guessing

Do you really know how much sun a flowerbed gets? Or do you just guess? Take the uncertainty out of gardening with a sensor that measures and records sunlight as well as temperature, moisture, and humidity. After monitoring for 24 hours, plug the EasyBloom sensor into your computer's USB port—it will connect to the EasyBloom Web site and provide a graphic readout of your garden conditions and even recommend suitable plants. \$60; easybloom.com



4 ways to be a savvy plant shopper

■ **Shop Thursdays and Fridays.** Garden centers stock up during weekdays. Get the best selection and quality by shopping before the weekend rush leaves only picked-over stock.

■ **Look for quality.** Annuals should be compact and uniformly green. Avoid trees and shrubs with dead branches or damaged trunks.

■ **Ask about guarantees.** A 1-year replacement policy lets you replace plants that don't survive the first winter.

■ **Buy named varieties.** Generic plants—those without a variety name—vary in appearance, while named varieties have consistent characteristics. For example, a tree labeled only as “amur maple” may or may not give you the brilliant fall color these maples are prized for, whereas “Red Rhapsody amur maple” should live up to its name.





I've heard that pruners can spread diseases from tree to tree. Is that true?



Yes, it's possible. If your trees appear healthy and you prune in winter when disease organisms are dormant, the risk is minimal. However, if you are cutting diseased or dead branches, or pruning during the growing season (not ideal but sometimes necessary) you should disinfect shears and saws as you work. To do this, dip shears in a 10% bleach solution after each cut.

Do you have a gardening question? Get answers from BHG experts as well as other gardeners at BHG.com/gardendoctor.

garden smarts

"When you till your garden soil this spring, soil should be just slightly moist. Cultivating wet soil can result in flowerbeds full of rock-hard clods."

Eric Liskey, deputy editor, gardens and outdoor living



ETERNAL FLAME

Nonstop Fire begonia is a terrific plant for small containers. Give it a sheltered part- to full-shade location and watch as the fiery flowers light up the shadows. Nonstop begonias are hardy in Zones 9-10; use as annuals in other Zones. To locate a retailer, go to provenwinners.com.

PHOTOS: (POTS) KRITSADA; (BEGONIA) PETE KRUMHARDT; (SHEARS) MARTY BALDWIN