



April in Northeast Shoreline

Article by Londa Jacques (2012)

Looks like another Shoreline Spring of below-average nighttime temperatures and record rainfalls.

Time to trod out to your garden between monsoons to give your soil the squish test. Grab a fistful of soil and squeeze. Does it clump together? Or crumble? In my location (northeast Shoreline) the soil in my in-ground garden is too wet to plant (clumps), but the soil in my raised beds is loose and friable, and is ready to go. This

is one advantage to raised beds. The disadvantage is slugs and snails love to lurk along the edges of the boards, all set to slither at the first sign of the smallest green, non-weedy leaf. If you have in-ground beds, don't walk on them. This compacts the soil even further. Lay wood down and walk on it, instead. Later, when you remove it, you can remove all of the slugs and snails that have taken up residence underneath.

Amend! Amend! Amend! One can never amend their soil too late or too often. Even at this late date, a little dolomite lime sprinkled and dug into your brassica beds (cabbage, kale, broccoli, cauliflower and their relatives) will help sweeten the soil, although the optimal time to add it would have been last Fall. That goes double, if your garden is surrounded by Doug firs or other evergreens.

If you haven't already done so, turn over that cover crop you so diligently planted in September. Of course, if you didn't plant a cover crop, most of the nitrogen in your garden has now been washed into the cracks in your driveway, and is feeding those dandelions that are already blooming profusely. Head to the nearest garden or home improvement store and buy the best organic compost and soil amendments you are able to afford and put them on your soil. Turn it as soon as your soil passes the squish test. Homemade compost, especially that which has been exposed to rains over the winter, has lost much of its nutrient content. You can still use it for mulching and adding weed seeds back into your beds. Because my compost pile's nutrient content is suspect, I use it around my ornamentals. Leaves (deciduous) if you're lucky enough to still have a pile, can be added. Chop them up first, before turning under so they break down quickly.

Many vegetables that grow well here can be planted over a few weeks. Don't be in a hurry to shove something in your plot without making soil improvements. Instead, spend the rainy days doing a little crop rotation planning. Hold off and buy those vegetable starts from a younger, fresher crop, shipped in late-April to early May, in warm, amended soil. If you can't wait, try your hand at planting seeds indoors.

See those gorgeous foot-tall tomato plants and squash in the grocery store display? Admire them and leave them there. They were hothouse-grown, and by the time you buy them, they will most likely be in shock from exposure to low temperatures. Tomatoes that go in the ground when nighttime temperatures reach 50 degrees, soon surpass those planted earlier. Last year

nighttime temperatures reached a consistent 50 degrees on Memorial Day weekend.

Cold-tolerant veggies can go in the ground now: Peas, spinach, kale, cabbage, Swiss chard, lettuce. Basically, if it will eventually yield a fancy fruit, such as a pepper or tomato, or zucchini, forget it. Think, green, leafy and far too good for you, and plant those things first, instead. We would be among the healthiest folks in the country, if we all learned to love to eat the veggies that grow here most easily!

Oh, and while you're waiting for that first batch of greens to grow taller than your snails, make a salad from the dandelions and dandelion flowers. They're delicious. You'll find them growing in that cold-method compost you spread last month.

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