

Lawm & Garden

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In Transfer to Outdoors, 'Harden Off' Starts

Developing Your
Plants' All-Important
Cutin Layer

BY JILL DEMETRE

Spring has finally sprung, and for those of us who love to garden, it is an exciting yet very busy time of the year. As the days get longer and the low temperatures begin to rise, the long-awaited spring chores can begin. Summer and fall blooming perennials such daylilies, Aster and Shasta daisies can be divided at this time; just make sure that the holes are pre-dug for the divisions' new homes. Water your new transplants immediately, and pamper them for the first couple of weeks with extra water while they adapt. A general rule of thumb is that when dividing plants, you'll want to do the divisions during their most dormant

see **HARDENING** on page 192



GETTING AHEAD – Camelot Gardens of Montrose employee Caron Schoof hydrated plants and flowers indoors. Transition plants grown indoors slowly, to their new outdoor location, so they "harden." (Photo by William Wood)

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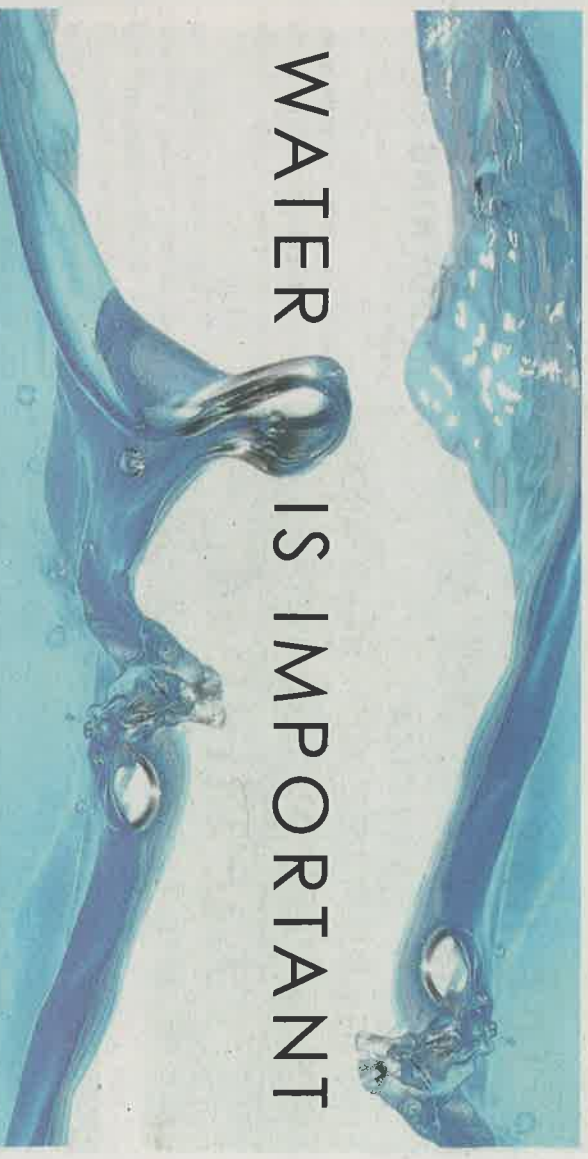
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Growing Your Vegetable Garden in a Container

BY MELINDA MYERS

Don't let a lack of time or space get in the way of gardening your way to a healthy lifestyle. Plant a container full of nutritious vegetables and herbs. Include a few planters on the front porch, back patio or right outside the kitchen door.

All that's needed is some potting mix, fertilizer, plants and a container with drainage holes. A fifteen to twenty-four inch diameter pot or twenty-four to thirty-six inch long window box is a good starting size. Bigger containers hold more plants and moisture longer, so it can be watered less frequently.

Check containers daily and water thoroughly as needed. Self-watering pots need less frequent watering, allowing busy gardeners and travelers the opportunity to grow plants in pots

see **GARDEN** on next page

MIXED VEGETABLES – All you need is potting mix, fertilizer, plants, and a container with drainage holes. (Courtesy photo)



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HARDENING from page 191

state of growth for example, summer and fall bloomers divide in the spring and spring bloomers divide in the fall.

Once all danger of frost has passed, roses can be trimmed. Cut back all of the dead canes and shape or cut back any living canes to desired height at the first set of leaves with five segments. Cutting back roses before the danger of frost has passed will encourage new growth, but can damage this season's growth, appearance and blooms. One of my favorite memories from my training is learning that roses were last in line, in the brain department. If a rose is cut back in the middle of winter with temperatures well below zero, it will think that it is spring, and begin to produce new growth. In the rose's defense, however, it does not have the sense of touch that we do, so it is unable to feel the cold.

Begin to water regularly, and if an unexpected cold spell appears, make sure that you give your gardens a nice drink beforehand. Water in the soil during cold spells protects the roots of plants and will also help keep plants from heaving with the drastic changes in temperature; also, monitor for insects and disease and treat accordingly.

It is important to not put any disease-infected plant material

into your compost pile, because the moisture and heat in a compost pile will cause undesired results of germinating and spreading the disease. Throw any damaged plant material away.

Weed control also begins in the spring, and if managed on a regular basis, you can save yourself from a much larger task later, getting more enjoyment out of your gardens throughout the summer. Don't allow any weeds to go to seed. Many weed seeds (such as bindweed) can survive for up to seven years without germinating, and can become a big problem at any time during that period. Weeds can be controlled manually by pulling or digging, or by purchasing one of the many narrow leaf herbicides for grass that may have drifted into flowerbeds or broadleaf herbicides for weeds in lawns. Plants' metabolisms depend on their leaf structure, so it is important to use these properly. There are also broad-spectrum herbicides that will kill anything (such as Round Up). Don't attempt to use these to control dandelions on your lawn, or you'll end up with dead spots where grass should be.

Finally, remember to harden off any plants you may have started indoors, or any that may not have been exposed to direct sunlight before, including plants you have purchased. Hardening off plants is a practice that gradu-

ally exposes plants to enduring the much different growing conditions of outdoors. They need to adapt to changes in wind and moisture, but most importantly, they need to develop a cutin layer on their leaves and stems. This cutin layer takes about two weeks to develop, and is important to the plant, because it not only acts as a sunscreen, but it will also help the plant develop its defenses against disease and insects. To properly harden off your plants, move them from the house to a shaded area for about two hours each day, for a couple of days. After this, gradually expose them to direct sunlight, beginning with two hours a day for two or three days, and then increase this time by a couple of hours every few days. It is natural for a plant to slightly wilt, but if burning appears on any plant, monitor and adjust its exposure times. This process will ensure that your plants will be ready for living outside without any sets backs.

Happy gardening!

Advanced Master Gardener and Master Gardener Educator Jill DeMette operates Morning Star Gardens Landscape Design, Consulting and Maintenance, 67749 Ridge View Drive, Montrose, CO 81403. She can be reached at 970/240-9619 or by fax at 970/240-9286.



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