

# Don't Plant Too Early

Written by Bob Yedowitz  
Florist, Gardening Expert, Television Personality

Even though the spring is here, and you may be getting anxious and want to start planting, you need to step back, take a deep breath and understand that a few warm days or weeks does not mean you can plant anything you want. Planting some plants too early in the season is not a good idea and instead of giving your plants a head start, you can actually set them back a few weeks.

When it comes to planting tender annuals like geraniums, new guinea impatiens, begonias and the like, it's better to be safe than sorry and the fact is that in most of the Hudson Valley, there is always the risk of unseasonably cool days and sometimes even downright cold nights through the middle of May. If you live in the more northern or western parts of the Hudson Valley, Memorial Day is a safer date to begin planting most tender annuals and vegetables. Even if you live in southern sections of Westchester, the traditional "Mother's Day" advice is not always safe and planting these tender plants is safest around Memorial Day.

Now you may be saying to yourself, "If it's too early to plant, why are all those plants on display, and being sold?" I can only surmise that the people suggesting the planting of certain plants too early in the season either don't know when to plant or don't want to know but as a consumer you should know because after all, it's your money.

So the question remains, what can I plant in April and early to mid- May?

There are lots of flowering plants (not just pansies) that you can plant in early spring that will actually grow better in the cooler temperatures. One of my favorite plants for early spring is Linaria 'Enchantment' (a hybrid toadflax) that just happens to be an ideal companion to pansies. Linaria resembles a miniature snapdragon and has fragrant magenta blooms with specks of gold that keep on flowering during cool spring weather and beyond. They grow 14-16 inches tall and look great in beds and in mixed container plantings with pansies and spring flowering bulbs. The blooms will fade with hot weather.

If you've ever grown snapdragons in your garden, you might have noticed that it blooms best in cooler temperatures. Dwarf varieties work well in a flower bed with other mixed annuals. As the flowers fade, pinch them back and they may keep blooming into the fall if summer is not too hot. Nemesis and Diascia are both members of the "snapdragon family", or at least they used to be. The taxonomists are at it again, questioning whether snapdragons actually belong to the family Scrophulariaceae where Nemesis and Diascia are located. Further DNA examination notwithstanding, the latter two are also excellent cool season plants.

Petunias rank among the most popular flowering annuals and although not frost tolerant if they have been hardened off by the commercial grower, they can be planted out a few weeks earlier than most of the other more tender annuals.

If vegetable gardening is your thing, leave the tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and basil for late May planting. In fact, some gardeners in upper Westchester and north don't put these plants in the ground until the first few days of June.

For earlier planting, think "Cole crops" which is a term used to describe several vegetables in the mustard family, including broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, and kohlrabi. These are cultivated varieties of the species Brassica oleracea and are cool-season vegetables that prefer 60-70 degree temperatures for optimal growth and can withstand light frosts without injury.

Depending on weather conditions, many types of lettuce can also be planted in April.

Happy Gardening.