

THE SAUK COUNTY GARDENER

Lots of garden tasks with summer's early arrival

Jeanne Manis, Wisconsin Certified Master Gardener

*"Plant and your spouse plants with you; weed and you weed alone."
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

I continue to clean and weed my garden beds. It is a lonely task; my husband is helpful with most gardening tasks, but this is one task he conveniently makes himself absent. With eight large perennial beds, six cutting gardens, and eight vegetable beds, I have a lot of work and I would appreciate the help. Don't feel bad for me though; this is the guy who installed two hanging retractable hose reels, got the tractor's bucket put back on (for moving mulch), set up the trellising for the tomatoes, and got my greenhouse fully operational this year. I resolve this fall I will cut most everything back,

mulch my leaves, and then spread them back into my flowerbeds. This will help curb spring weeds and still provide a home for wintering over insects. Come next spring, I might have a chance of getting my flower beds ready before summer arrives.

We should be past the point of frost so you can plant any stored geraniums; you'll see new growth in about a week. Start checking your mums; once they reach six inches, pinch off one-half of it and continue until July to encourage them to be bushier. As spring blooming bulbs fade, remove the faded flowers, but allow the foliage to die back naturally to put energy back into the bulbs. I typically interplant my mums and daffodils as the mums' summer growth covers the dying leaves of the daffodils. Pinch your annuals when they are 4 - 6 inches tall to promote

growth. Stake your delphinium and put rings around your peonies before they get too tall. Plant and stake dahlia divisions. I potted up mine earlier in the season, so I'll be putting out nearly 40 full size plants. I already have stakes set aside for them.

In the vegetable garden, plant celery, melons, squash, cucumbers, pumpkins, and my favorite, tomatoes. When you plant your tomatoes, remove the lower leaves, and bury the stems a little deeper to provide stability. Place a thin layer of newspaper and then a layer of straw mulch under the tomatoes. This will help retain soil moisture and prevent soil-borne diseases such as Verticillium Wilt or Fusarium Wilt from splashing up on the bottom of tomato leaves. Try to plant your tomatoes in a different location than last year. A three- to five-year rotation is recommended if possible. Store extra seeds in a cool, dry location for future use. Cover beans, cucumbers,

and melons with lightweight floating row covers after planting to aid insect control. Record when strawberries bloom; you can expect strawberries in approximately 30 days.

Continue to prune junipers, arborvitae, yews, and hemlock through early summer. Hedges can also be pruned, smaller at the top and wider at the base. Prune pines by cutting two-thirds of the new growth. Prune spring blooming shrubs shortly after they flower. Finally, mow your yard before dandelions go to seed. My grass is tall right now but I'm waiting for the pollinators to finish blooming for the seed heads though, the mower will come out. I had to dig out too many dandelions out of my flower beds this year. I don't mind them in my grass, but once they are in my flower beds, it's no holds barred. Enjoy the beautiful weather and happy weeding, I mean planting!

April showers bring May garlic mustard

Jaqi Christopher, DNR Forest Invasive Plant Specialist

Spring is here! Invasive plants, like garlic mustard, are often among the first green life to emerge in the new season.

Garlic mustard is an aggressive invasive species that can blanket a forest and outcompete native vegetation. It releases chemicals into the soil that prevent other plants from growing too close. These chemicals can disrupt associations between mycorrhizal fungi and native plants, thereby suppressing plant growth.

Garlic mustard grows in two life stages (biennial). As shown below, the leaves grow as basal rosettes, or small heart-



Photo by Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Basal rosette of garlic mustard leaves in first year.

shaped leaves close to the ground, in its first year. In its second year, mature flowering stems develop. Garlic mustard leaves have a strong garlic fragrance.

The substantial number of seeds produced by a single garlic mustard plant also contributes to its ability to outcompete other plants. Garlic mustard seeds also remain viable in the soil for years.

Luckily, there are solutions to combat this persistent plant. The most common management techniques for garlic mustard include hand pulling and chemical control.

The Midwest Invasive Plant Network provides a guide for those interested in garlic mustard management on their property. It can feel like a daunting task to control the species on your property, but early detection can make a big difference. Set a goal for yourself to prevent plants from flowering. This will help you get ahead of it setting seed.

So, get out there! Take a walk through your woods to look for this early emerging invasive.



Photo by Rachel Rogge, via the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) has a two-year life cycle, and one plant can produce more than 7,000 seeds before dying.

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