

Wasn't last weekend marvelous? I don't know about you, but I sure got a lot done. I mulched various beds, planted a ton of plants and creaked upright again to spray a couple of apple trees before seeding some of the outdoor beds. Now if we could get a little rain, everything will be watered and growing like gangbusters. But in spite of the warm temperatures don't be tempted to put tender plants outdoors just yet. We can still get a killing frost. I generally consider May 15 to be about the last frost date, but over the last few years, that date has crept toward May 1. As of now we had a frost on April 15, but I don't see one forecast for the next few days, so just maybe we'll see an early spring.

**Lawns**

Lawns need a lot of TLC at this time of year. You need to fertilize them. If you get crabgrass, use pre-emergence, but remember, if you use pre-emergence you won't be able to use grass clippings as mulch for at least two months. Neither will you be able to reseed bare patches for at least six weeks. If you want to seed bare patches, first rake over the patch, seed it lightly, then rake in the seeds. Water it lightly and keep the surface moist and you should see new grass in about two weeks.

**Flower gardens**

If you haven't done it already, rake off last year's debris and clean up the flower beds. Apply a heavy layer of mulch to stop weeds from springing up everywhere and you should be ready to go. You may need to cut back some of the flowers that are self-seeding or expanding into other parts of the garden. So look carefully at where the plants should be and where they've migrated and adjust them carefully.

**Vegetable gardens**

You should have your potatoes in by now. If not, hop to it. The few early spuds I grow in the greenhouse are about six inches



**The Island Garden**

By Roger Marshall

tall and growing well, but the outdoor ones are only just starting to show. Peas can also be planted. I find it best to start them indoors and transplant when they are about two to three inches high. This helps to stop mice from eating the seeds. I've also started lettuce, spinach, bok choy, pac choy, endive, and a few other greens in the germination chamber ready to go into the garden in the next week or two. They'll be covered with a cloche for a couple of weeks in case we get a late frost.

My onions just came. For \$19.95, I buy onion plants from Dixondale Farms in Texas. There are about 200 plants, yellow, red, and white. The onions from the same people that I harvested last year lasted well into the winter, so I'm looking forward to this year's crop. The new plants can be planted out in the next few days. Outdoors, the sorrel, which is a perennial and makes a lemony tasting soup, is ready to be harvested. So we'll have a chilled sorrel soup and homemade bread one evening next week.

**In the greenhouse**

We're still harvesting key limes, even though the tree is in bloom again. The fig trees have all leafed out, and the other citrus trees are in bloom giving the greenhouse wonderful aroma. Another couple of weeks and we'll start unpacking the fruit trees and moving them to their summer homes.

In the cold greenhouse, the lettuce, spinach, pak choy, and other greens are almost ready to harvest. About another week I'd say, and I've already started the second crop of greens. The green-

house sugar snap peas are about ten inches high while the outdoor peas from the same batch are only about four inches. Shows what a few degrees of warmth can do. The artichokes are growing like crazy, and the strawberries are about the size of a fingertip.

**Shrubs**

Not much to do for your shrubs right now. Enjoy the colors of the rhododendrons and prune immediately after the blossoms drop. Mulch around your shrubs and put a little compost at the base of each plant to help supply a few more nutrients.

**Germination chamber**

You can start broccoli and other brassicas if you haven't already done so. Start lettuce and other greens, start corn and beans as well. Your tomato, eggplants, and peppers should be about six inches tall by now. If not, there's plenty already on sale at garden centers, but I'd wait a little before I put them out. A frost could stop them in their tracks.

**Fruit trees**

You can spray dormant oil right up until bud break. Apricots and plums are already in flower so you'll probably have to wait until the petals drop before spraying again. Put bands of sticky goop around the trunks of your fruit trees to keep climbing insects from reaching the growing tips. I've seen fruit flies around already so be prepared to protect your fruit with either a quick spray or a fruit fly stocking.

**Soft fruit bushes**

The only thing that gooseberries, red, white, and black currant bushes need now is a side dressing of well-rotted compost to supply some of the nutrients that are being used to push out leaves. Put more compost around blueberry bushes, or use some acidic fertilizer as soon as the bushes leaf out.

For gardeners this is the busiest time of the year, you make use of whatever daylight you can to get a much done as possible. Remember, have fun out there!

**Book signing set for Sunday**

Author and gardener Barbara Gee will sign her new book at the Blithewold Mansions and Gardens this Sunday, April 27.

Gee's new book is "The Rhode Island Gardener's Companion: An Insider's Guide to Gardening in the Ocean State."

The signing will be from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

In addition to the book signing, Blithewold's Greenhouse will be open, and Julie Morris, Director of Horticulture, will be on hand to lend her expertise and answer gardening questions from 1 to 4 p.m.

For more information, call 253-2707 or visit [www.blithewold.org](http://www.blithewold.org).

**Go bird watching in East Greenwich**

A May 3 bird-watching walk at Boesch Farm will be led by Geoff Dennis, who has given talks at the farm a number of times over the past few years. Early risers who are interested should meet promptly at the parking lot by 9 a.m. Bring binoculars and dress warm.

Bird photography started as a hobby for Geoff Dennis, whose Little Compton residence attracts an amazing variety of feathered creatures. Now this RI fisherman has an impressive portfolio of bird photography, which has been featured at the Bristol Audubon Center's Annual Bird Conference and in the advertising campaigns of several birdfeeder companies. Come view a colorful slide show of Dennis's work, and listen to him tell how he got these amazing shots. His presentation is always entertaining and full of tips for attracting birds to your yard at home.

Ledge Ends Learning Center will be hosting this program at the historic Boesch Farm, which is located at 830 South Rd. in East Greenwich. The fee is \$10 for adults and \$6 for children. Pre-registration is required as this popular event will fill up quickly. To sign up for any program, email Trish at [LedgeLearning@hotmail.com](mailto:LedgeLearning@hotmail.com).

**Container gardening demo planned**

The Friends of the Jamestown Library will host "Gardening in Containers" on Thursday, May 1, at 7 p.m. at the Jamestown library.

David Urban, the new proprietor of the Secret Garden will present a lively, informative program with tips and hints on the best practices to get the most from container gardens. A raffle of the demonstration container garden will be held at the end of the program.

This is a good chance to meet the new owner of the Secret Garden and spend an hour with friends and neighbors at the library. This program is free and open to the public. For more information, contact the library at 423-7280.

**Learn to hook rugs from master 'thrummer'**

On Sunday, May 4, from 1 to 3 pm, Dolores Bannister, of the Little Rhody Thrummers will offer a workshop in the art of traditional rug hooking. This workshop is recommended for adults and older teens.

A materials fee of \$15 will supply participants with a small frame, a hook, and enough material for three mini rugs.

Checks may be made payable to the Friends of Jamestown Library. Visit the library to register for the workshop. For more information, call 423-7280.

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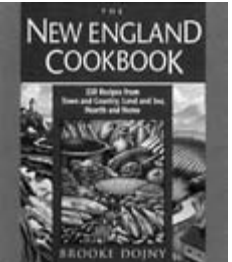
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