

Happy March Veggies

Stop pining for what is yet to come – seize the day in the garden.

With apologies to Robert Herrick, who extolled us back in the early 1600s to gather rosebuds while we are still able, I am urging folks to “plant ye ‘taters while ye may.” If you have cold-hardy stuff already growing in your garden, beds, or pots, there isn’t any room for summer stuff yet.

Folks keep saying it looks like spring is finally here, with all the flowers and stuff popping. I say they are wasting their precious to-day waiting for something to come rather than enjoying each day as it is. Why wait for the right time to plant summer stuff, or put it in the ground too early and risk root rot or late frosts? Why act like farmers and Northern gardeners, waiting to put in one main crop a year?

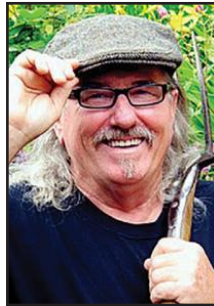
Actually, I know the answer to that: Spring Fever is a real thing, and it’s in our genes; the budding of late winter flowers, chirping of birds, buzzing of bees, and smell of warm, moist soil, stimulate our shrunken pineal glands into spurting

hormonal juice that makes us want to get something in the ground.

But unlike row crop farmers, and gardeners in colder climates who have a shorter planting season, Mississippians can plant and harvest vegetables, herbs, and flowers nearly every month of the year. Our warm growing season is long enough for us to have two complete start-to-finish tomato/pepper/zinnia/basil crops, and for lagniappe we can then plant cool season veggies in early fall and again in late winter (right now).

For me, there’s no waiting for another day, no bare dirt right now. Back in the fall I sowed crimson clover seed in areas I plan on having summer tomatoes and peppers; all winter it has bulked up with leafy tops and nitrogen-gathering roots, which keeps the soil loose enough to dig later, plus it helps the soil dry earlier and when finally dug in it creates a fantastic summer soil. I cover areas in between with tree leaves to protect it in the winter and dig in in the fall.

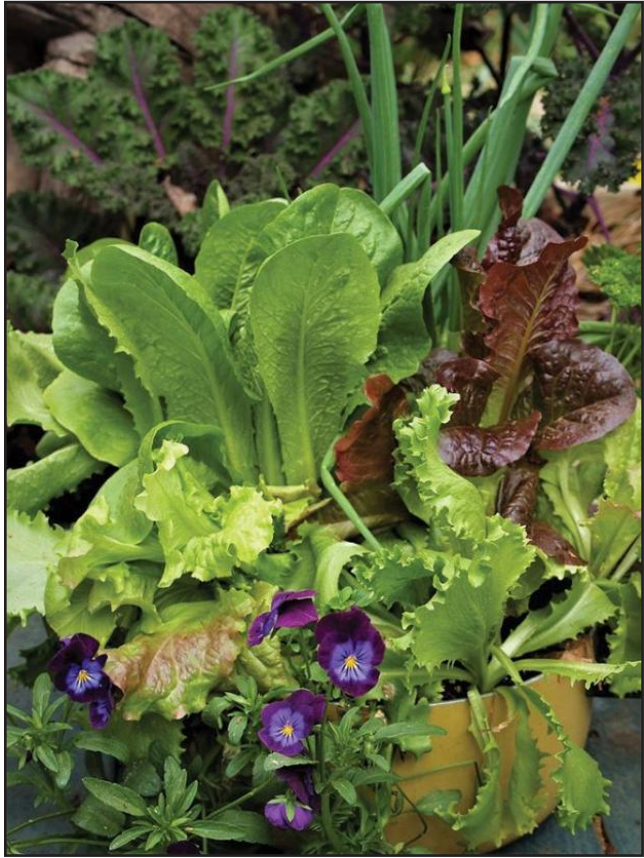
In both raised beds and pots I just planted English



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and edible pod peas, potatoes, all sorts of colorful lettuces and other leafy greens, broccoli, cabbage, and a few leftover pansies I found at a garden center. All those will carry me happily into time to plant summer stuff. I actually leave space between or behind them to have room to interplant summer stuff that will be waiting when I’m done with my cool season crops.

And when I harvest the

late winter crops, the dirt is loose and rich and ready to plant more summer stuff. When the summer stuff is harvested, I put more summer stuff for fall. When that is harvested, I plant cool season stuff for winter.

We may or may not get another frost or freeze, but it usually happens; our average last frosts are in mid to late march, which means that half the time they happen later. We’ve had frosts

in April.

Thinking ahead starts right now. Seize the day; plant a potful of lettuces, or a small patch of sweet edible-pod peas. Stick some tomato plants in bigger pots and set out in the sun to get fuller and stockier before planting next month.

Real spring and summer will be here soon enough, bringing torrid weather that

will make us pine for what we are having right now. Take advantage of today, savor your efforts, and garden accordingly as empty spaces opens up.

Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the “Gestalt Gardener” on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.

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