



Gardener's Notebook

Volume 18, No. 2

News, Advice & Special Offers for Bay Area Gardeners

April 2004

Spring Gardening



Exquisite Flowering Vines • Organic Perennials • Old-Fashioned Favorites and Much More!

The compelling case for adding castings to your soil

While there will always be the question of which end is which, one thing for sure is that earthworms are one of Mother Nature's most powerful catalysts for healthy plant growth.

Research studies from around the world have established conclusively that earthworms are responsible for chemical, physical, and microbiological changes in soil that have a very positive effect on plants.

Earthworms and their castings, which

are excreted after the worms consume organic matter, are responsible for improving soil texture and porosity.

In addition, once processed by worms, the nitrogen, potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, and numerous other trace minerals found in organic matter are easier for plants to absorb.

To help gardeners utilize the powerful benefits of earthworms, **E. B. Stone Organics** offers easy-to-use **Super Earthworm Castings**. To use the castings,



simply spread a 1/4 inch layer over your soil and work it in to a depth of about six inches. The castings can also be used to mulch around shrubs, flowers and vegetables. Earthworm casting are 100% natural and will make a powerful addition to your soil.

Gardening Guide

April

Plant

Load your garden with the season's most colorful plants. Just about everything we offer is budding or blooming!

Vegetable starts and seeds are in great supply now. Pick up a mini greenhouse and start your seeds today.

Plan ahead and plant perennials and other specimens to fill your garden with summer color.

Fertilize

Use **E. B. Stone Organics Sure Start** with all new plantings to help them get established quickly.

Fertilize with **E. B. Stone Organics All Purpose Plant Food**, and **Citrus and Fruit Tree Food**. See our staff for more plant-specific fertilizer recommendations.



Use **Agricultural Lime** to improve vegetable crops, especially tomatoes.

Lawns are ready for some attention. Feed them with **GreenAll Pro Formula Lawn Food**.

Prune/Maintain

Improving the quality of your soil should top your list of spring activities. An optimal loamy soil balance promotes drainage, air and water penetration. Use **Sloat Loam Builder**, **Sloat Forest Mulch Plus** or **Sloat Planting Mix**, which are custom-blended for Bay Area gardens. Add worm castings to your beds to increase nutrient uptake (see article above).

Control pests before they gain control of your garden using the latest environmentally smart techniques and products. Release ladybugs, green lacewings and other beneficial insects to prevent pest damage to your plants.

Continue the war on destructive snails that ravage gardens by night and hide during the day. **Sluggo Snail Bait** works great and is the perfect non-toxic alternative to products containing metaldehyde.

Prune azaleas and camellias after they bloom.

Spray fruit eliminator on ornamental olive, crab apple and other trees where you'd like to prevent the formation of unwanted fruit.



Build a pop-bottle Wormery A great project for kids

Here's a quick, easy and fun project for your children that will demonstrate how earth-friendly worms live and help improve a garden's soil.

Step one: Cut the top off a clear plastic liter bottle of your favorite beverage.

Step two: Place a smaller water bottle — about 3/4 full of water with the top on — inside the liter bottle. (This keeps the soil cool.)

Step three: Alternate adding about 1-inch layers of sand and peat moss around the water bottle to fill the liter bottle within about 3 inches of the bottle's lip. Make the last layer peat moss. (Sloat carries small sizes of horticultural sand and peat moss.)

Step four: Add about 1/2 cup water to moisten the sand and peat layers.

Step five: Gather grass clippings, leaves, apple peels or just about any other organic matter that will decompose and place a final layer on your wormery.

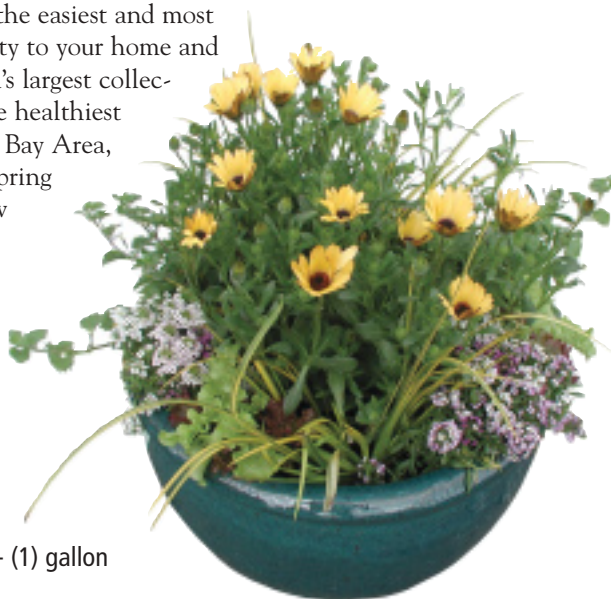
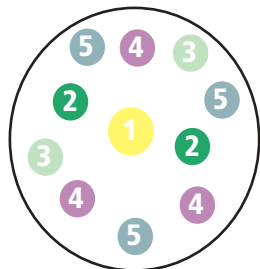
Step six: Add worms from your garden on top of the organic matter. The best worms are red banded wigglers which can be found under pots or purchased at Sloat.

Keep your wormery in a cool, dark place (simulating the underground) when you are not observing it. In no time you will see the worms have travelled between the layers and are busy eating your organic material and mixing the soils.



Sloat's spring container recipe

Container gardening is one of the easiest and most flexible ways to add seasonal beauty to your home and garden. With Northern California's largest collection of fine garden pottery and the healthiest plants you'll find anywhere in the Bay Area, you just can't go wrong. Try this spring container recipe in one of our new 15-inch aqua pots.



- 1 Osteospermum 'Lemon Symphony' - (1) gallon
- 2 Acorus 'Ogon' - (2) 4 inch
- 3 Bacopa - (2) 4 inch
- 4 Easter Bonnet Mix Alyssum - (3) 4 inch
- 5 Mixed Lettuce Red & Green - (2) 6-Packs Note 3 plugs planted together in each locale.

Attention and prevention, the keys to controlling common plant diseases

Naturally we'd love to devote this entire newsletter to discussing beautiful plants, but we know a few words now will help avoid many future discussions of powdery mildew, black spot, rust, and other common spring problems!

When the weather turns warm and muggy, many plant diseases emerge and spread. Unless you are extremely lucky, you are going to experience a few disease-related problems this spring.

The first step in thwarting common problems is to pay close attention to your plants. While this advice may sound simplistic, it is nevertheless very important as early detection is more than half the battle. Diseases often start rather inconspicuously and may first appear under leaves. Close attention translates to inspecting your plants on a regular basis and flipping leaves over for a look.

The tendency for many gardeners is to wait and see if a possible problem gets

worse. In our experience, it usually does.

By the time many gardeners decide to address a disease it can be a real struggle . . . or worse. If you spot something and you're not sure if it's a good or bad sign, bring it down and let one of our trained experts assist you.

Preventing serious outbreaks is the best technique for controlling diseases and involves treating problems early with a broad spectrum fungicide. A good fungicide, such as **Fung-onil**, will treat all major garden diseases including powdery mildew, black spot, rust, scab, anthracnose and botrytis.

Fung-onil is a good choice for roses and other ornamental plants as well as for vegetables and fruit trees. It's odorless, water based, and comes in a convenient, ready to use spray bottle. As with any garden product, you should take time to read the directions so it can be applied safely and with maximum effectiveness.

By keeping a watchful eye out for problems and considering 32 ounces of prevention, you're sure to have a great spring and summer season of gardening!



SLOAT SEMINARS

Attendance is limited. Please call ahead to the seminar location to reserve a seat. Seminar fee is \$5. (Gardener's Reward Program members are free.)

Indoor Orchids

Join Glen Smith, past president of the Marin Orchid Society, when he discusses successful orchid growing and care as well as techniques for encouraging these wonderful plants to rebloom.

Apr. 3 - Danville, Saturday - 10 a.m.

Vegetables with Dinah

Join Sloat's award-winning vegetable grower Dinah Sims when she discuss tips and techniques to maximize your spring vegetable harvest. Sims has won awards for her vegetables at the Marin County Fair.

Apr. 3 - Mill Valley (Miller), Saturday - 10 a.m.

Apr. 17 - Larkspur, Saturday - 10 a.m.

Apr. 24 - San Rafael, Saturday - 10 a.m.

Healthy Gardens

Learn how to enjoy gardening without harming the environment with tips from local expert, Annie Joseph. This essential seminar will show you how to solve pest problems, fertilize and much more. (See article on page 6.)

Apr. 10 - Mill Valley (Miller), Saturday - 10 a.m.

Apr. 14 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.) Wednesday - 6:30 p.m.

Apr. 24 - Mill Valley (Miller), Saturday - 10 a.m.

Cottage Gardens

Join Sloat's Gerry O'Donoghue to learn how to create a charming cottage garden. He will discuss plant selection, color use, design ideas and much more.

Apr. 28 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.) Wednesday - 6:30 p.m.

Time to start a vegetable garden

Don't wait any longer to get your vegetable garden started. Sloat offers a complete selection of seeds

as well as heirloom tomato starts, specialty basil, parsleys and much more.

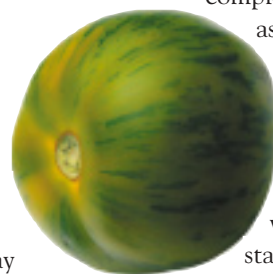
Our Germination

Stations are a great way to get your seeds started and don't forget

some **E.B. Stone Organic**

Seed Starter Mix.

Learn some awarding winning growing techniques at one of our upcoming vegetable gardening seminars. (See the seminar listing above.)



Clematis: An exquisite vine for your garden

When you spot a flowering clematis vine in bloom it is truly a sight to behold. Whether its lovely flowers and foliage are seen cascading over a rock



Photo: MONROVIA

Clematis montana rubens

wall, climbing a wrought iron fence, winding up and over an arbor or simply ascending a lamp post, clematis vines are beautiful and inspiring.

Where and when this versatile plant began showing up in gardens around the world is not clear. The origin of the word clematis is the Greek word klema referring to the tendrils of a grapevine. The fact that this plant is native to Europe, Asia, and North America more than suggests that it was used in gardens long before it received a formal name.

First cultivated in Europe in the 1500s, it was called "traveller's Joy" by botanist John Gerard who grew several varieties. His nickname captured the welcoming appeal to travellers who

encountered autumn clematis growing by the roadside with its abundant and fragrant white flowers.

Clematis popularity surged in the 19th and 20th centuries as breeders in Britain, France, Belgium and Germany introduced many new hybrids including *C. x jackmanii* by Britain's leading hybridizer Jackman Nursery.

Today, clematis is practically indispensable to gardeners looking to curtain walls, adorn trellises, pergolas and other structures with beauty and add vertical interest to their gardens.

Growing Clematis

Clematis can live indefinitely so investing the time to correctly site your plant and then providing proper care is worth your while.

It is said that a clematis likes its feet in the shade and head in the sun. Most varieties need at least 5 - 6 hours of sun each day, but the roots of the plant need to be kept

place some coarse material in the bottom of the hole and add some **Sloat Loam Builder** to your native soil to help promote drainage.

Position the crown of the plant 3 to 5 inches below soil level (something you would not do with most other plants) and mulch to keep the roots cool.

Mulching with a product such as **Sloat's Forest Mulch Plus** provides insulation against heat and helps retain moisture. Keep the mulch about eight inches away from the stem to help prevent root rot.

Water needs to be regular especially during the hot summer months. Clematis



Photo: MONROVIA

Clematis armandii

will not tolerate a drought and will wilt. During the winter months when the plant is dormant, do not overwater.

Prune your clematis if it is outgrowing your garden or you want to bring the flowers down from atop a tall plant to where you can see them.

Pruning technique will depend on the variety. Most plants will take a hard prune and bounce back, though with some species a major haircut may take some time to

recover. Earlier flowering species including *C. montana* and *C. alpina* flower on last year's growth, so a light pruning after flowering is apt to be best. A more



Photo: MONROVIA

Clematis viticella

cool.

When preparing a hole for planting, a 24" by 24" hole is ideal. In our clay soil,

dramatic prune as mentioned earlier may require a year or more of patience before you are enjoying a regular flower display.

Other varieties can take a hard prune each year. For more pruning advice, please check with our expert staff or *Sunset's Western Garden Book*.

Varieties

Here are some of the varieties we offer and recommend:

C. montana - Anemone clematis. Native to the Himalayas and China, it offers a spectacular spring display of flowers. It's hardy, easy to grow and prunes easily.

C. montana rubens

Offers wonderful spring color from sweetly fragrant, anemone-like flowers. This quick-growing vine is great for arbors. New growth has purplish coloring, maturing to bronzy green. It is deciduous and its vigorous-growing stems will reach 20 to 25 feet.

C. x jackmanii. This variety offers prolific growth to 10 feet in one season. With lovely purple flowers, it's one of the

most popular varieties. Jackman clematis is very reliable and is excellent for trellises, fences, or on rock walls.

Clematis x 'Ernest Markham'

An award winning and very reliable clematis cultivar valued for its large, open magenta flowers. A good pick for training on walls, arbors, or growing over or through medium to tall shrubs. A deciduous, fast-growing plant for full to partial sun.

Clematis x 'Hagley Hybrid'

Here's a compact-growing, free flowering selection dis-

playing large, rosy mauve blooms. This deciduous variety is best trained on arbors, fences or grown over or through medium size shrubs. Avoid direct, hot sun.

Clematis x 'General Sikorski'

An outstanding vine with brilliant, rich lavender blooms with a hint of red on the midribs. A fine ground cover or climber for arbors, fences or onto tall shrubs. Deciduous. Full to partial sun.

Clematis x 'Ramona'

A wonderful variety offering brilliantly

colored large blooms on a woody vine with leathery-textured foliage. Another deciduous variety that makes a fine ground cover or climber for arbors and fences.

Clematis viticella 'Etoile Violette'

Showy pinwheel-shaped flowers from elegant elongated buds cover this vigorous vine for a long season. It performs in warmer areas where large-flowered clematis often will not grow. It also offers attractive branched foliage and is deciduous.

You'll love this handy light-weight shovel

At about 2 1/2 pounds and 34 inches long, our carbon steel shovel is not only easy to handle, but extremely strong and useful.

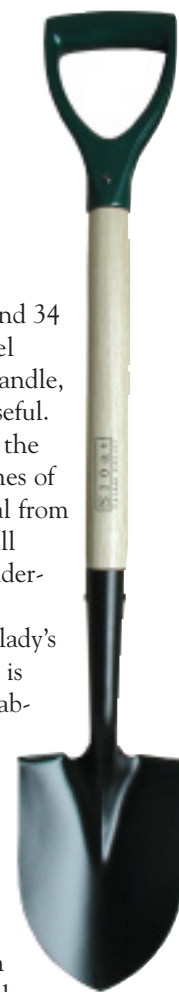
While larger shovels are the right tool for moving volumes of dirt, gravel or other material from one place to another, a small shovel like this one is considerably more versatile.

Sloat's small shovel, or "lady's shovel" as it is often called, is ideal for digging around established plantings. With a smaller head, it won't disturb your perennials, for example, when you change out seasonal annuals in a garden bed.

Along with planting chores it can pry rocks from the ground and dig out stubborn weeds.

You'll also discover it is just the right size for reaching into a bag of loam builder, mulch, or other soil amendment and can assist you in turning your compost pile, too.

Sloat offers a full range of shovels, spades, hoes, and other tools for you to consider. Quality tools make gardening more enjoyable!



Clematis x jackmanii

Photo: MONROVIA

Soil Products to Supercharge Your Garden

If you'd like to enjoy the most successful (and easiest) year of gardening ever, make a commitment to getting and keeping your soil in tip-top shape with Sloat Planting Mix, Sloat Loam Builder and Sloat Forest Mulch Plus.

Each of these soil products has been custom blended to amend and improve the dominant soil types found in the San Francisco Bay Area. By using these products, you'll increase plant performance and improve soil structure, moisture retention, aeration and water penetration. These soil products are especially effective in taming heavy clay soils and holding nutrients in your soil.



**Only at
Sloat
Garden
Centers**

What you can do to protect the environment . . . while enjoying your garden

When you visit our stores in search of remedies for pest problems you'll see that we offer one of the Bay Area's best selections of "less toxic" products.

About six years ago, Sloat began supporting a program called **Our Water Our World** (OWOW), which was formed to address the serious impact home gardening is having on our creeks and bay.

In 1997, Central Contra Costa Sanitary District began to see a high death rate in a test organism used to monitor treated water before discharging it into the bay. The test organism was a water flea similar to a flea that is a food source for local salmon.

Tests detected two pesticides, Diazinon and chlorpyrifos (Dursban) in the water, and it was determined that 60% of these pesticides was coming from homeowners.

The discovery was the tip of the proverbial iceberg as pesticides showed up in alarming rates around the Bay Area. Some 35 creeks (eight in Marin) were listed as impaired due to Diazinon.

Marin County Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program and OWOW embarked on a public awareness campaign to address the situation. Once this serious problem was brought to our attention, Sloat became an active participant in the program.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is the strategy this program emphasizes for keeping pests at acceptable, low levels. It promotes less toxic pest controls as well as explains the best ways to keep toxic substances from entering our waterways.

Annie Joseph, a local representative from OWOW, will be offering free **Healthy Garden** seminars this month (See seminar listing on Page 3) and we highly encourage our customers to attend. If gardening makes you feel good, attend-

ing a Healthy Garden seminar will make you feel even better!

Please look for the Our Water Our World signs in our garden centers which will help you identify less toxic products to use in your garden. Sloat nursery professionals have also been trained in less toxic pest management and are ready to

NEW! Organic perennials available at Sloat

If you're ready to catch the next exciting wave in gardening, look for the **Flatland Flower Farm** display on your next visit.

Sloat is pleased to be among the first garden centers in the West to offer **certified organic perennials** to its gardening customers.

Organic perennials, like organic produce, are grown under strict guidelines that, among other things, prohibit the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in production.

"While the health benefits of organic produce are obvious by now, many people don't think about ornamental flowers and plants as being potentially harmful to their bodies or the environment," explains Dan Lehrer, of Flatland Flower Farm.

Dan and his wife Joanne Krueger, have been growing organic perennials since 1995 and started their business in the Berkeley flats (hence the company name) before moving to Sebastopol to expand production.

Flatland Flower Farm uses beneficial insects, organic fertilizers and other techniques to produce what it believes are superior plants.

help you solve pest problems in ways that reduce environmental and health risks.

Check out www.ourwaterourworld.org for additional information on products, IPM, and more.

Spread the word to your family and friends about the safe use of pesticides and smart gardening practices!

"The feedback we get on our perennials is fantastic," say Lehrer. "Our plants haven't been artificially pumped up with chemicals. When gardeners get our healthy plants home they tell us that they do exceptionally well in their gardens."

Flatland Flower Farm provides a variety of perennials in 4-inch pots and 6-packs. Look for the **USDA and certified organic** plant tags on these plants. Here are three of many noteworthy organic perennials to look for this spring:



Phacelia bolanderi. A California native, phacelia grows to 2 feet with clusters of pale lavender flowers and lovely foliage, too. It's great for dry shade and under oaks.

Salvia apiana. Also known as bee sage, this California native is a deerproof sage and has showy silver leaves and white flowers.

Solanum pyracanthum. This wild-looking plant has fuzzy orange leaves and bright orange, thorny midribs. With purple flowers and fruit, this perennial has to be seen to be believed!



These old-fashioned plants never lose their charm

Beautiful plants never go out of style. Two old fashioned plants that filled the gardens of a generation ago and enjoy enthusiastic appreciation today are weigela and viburnum.

Weigela is hard to miss in a spring garden. It's a bloom factory that produces copious amounts of red, pink, white or purple funnel-shaped flowers beginning in April. The plant is a member of the honeysuckle family (Caprifoliaceae) and is native to Japan, Korea and Northern



Weigela florida Minuet

China where there are about 10 species. The most common species found in gardens around the world is *W. florida* of which there are some very beautiful hybrid varieties.

Weigelas are deciduous shrubs that prefer full sun to partial shade. Depending on the variety, their mature height may be anywhere from about 3 to 7 feet or more. Due to its size, it is well-suited

as a background planting, perhaps along a fence or as a transition plant between a more formal planting area and native landscape. The plants can also be used



Weigela florida Java Red

a mixed border or as an attractive screen. New weigela varieties carry the beauty of the plant past the flowering season. Foliage color has been a focus of breeders as well as flower color, plant hardiness and more.

Here are two of many popular weigelas to consider:

Weigela florida 'Java Red'

This compact, mounding shrub displays attractive red buds that open to deep pink blooms. Its foliage has an interesting purplish cast. Use it as a background planting, summer screen or in a shrub border.

Weigela florida 'Minuet'

Here's a spectacular display of rosy-pink blooms against a backdrop of purple-tinged foliage. Use it to add color in shrub borders or as a garden accent.

Viburnum, our second old-fashioned plant, has always interested gardeners as it has so many landscape possibilities. Depending on the variety, the plant can offer gardeners handsome foliage, striking flowers, spicy fragrance, showy fruit and a number of growth habits. Deciduous varieties offer fall color, too!

There are some 200 species of the viburnum worldwide and more than half are native to North America. Smaller viburnums are often planted alongside other shrubs as specimen plantings while larger varieties are used as screens, hedges and as back-

drops for other plants.

Viburnums are easy to grow and most will do well in heavy, rich soils. They prefer sun to part shade and will adapt to a wide range of climate conditions.

Viburnums can be pruned, shaped or left

alone. To get an idea of what this special plant can bring to your garden, consider

our recommended varieties listed here.

V. carlesii 'Korean Spice'

Count on large clusters of spicy-scented, waxy pink flowers that fade to white and bright red berries that fade to black in fall. Its foliage becomes red and burgundy in autumn. Plant it as a shrub border, in back of perennial beds and as a foundation plant.

V. plicatum tomentosum 'Summer Snowflake'

With a broadly rounded form, this medium-size deciduous shrub has tiered horizontal branches that mag-



Viburnum opulus Sterile Eastern Snowball



Viburnum carlesii (on cover in flower)

nificantly display the large, flat flower clusters. Its red fruit in fall is very ornamental.

V. opulus 'Sterile' (Eastern Snowball)

This variety's masses of pure white snowball-like flower clusters offer a very showy display. Its bright green leaves have a purplish-red fall coloring making the plant a spectacular landscape specimen.

V. tinus 'Bewley's Variegated'

This viburnum's handsome, clean-looking variegated foliage backs pink buds that open into clusters of white flowers in spring. The flowers are followed by metallic blue fruit. It's excellent for screens and hedges.

Nine Locations in San Francisco, Marin & Contra Costa

Richmond District
3rd Avenue between
Geary & Clement
752-1614

Sunset District
2700 Sloat Blvd.
46th & Sloat Blvd.
566-4415

Novato
2000 Novato Blvd. at
Wilson
897-2169

San Rafael
1580 Lincoln Ave.
just off Hwy. 101
453-3977

Larkspur
279 Doherty Drive between
Redwood High &
Downtown
924-7390
Kentfield
700 Sir Francis Drake at
Wolfe Grade
454-0262

Mill Valley
657 E. Blithedale at Lomita
388-0102
401 Miller at La Goma
388-0365
Danville
828 Diablo Road
(925) 743-0288

Open 7 days a week
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**Garden Design
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A weapon for the war on weeds

While you're rejoicing in the arrival of spring you might overlook for a moment that your weeds are growing as fast as your plants.

It won't be long before your flowerbeds, sidewalks, paths, driveway and just about any spot where a bit of dirt can hold a seed are sprouting all kinds of pesky weeds.

One very easy way to take charge of weed growth is to use a new product we discovered recently that's been a big hit on the East Coast for years.

Kleenup is a tough, fast-acting water-based product that comes in a spray bottle or concentrate. One of the things we really like about Kleenup is that it's absorbed through the leaf and is translocated down to the weed's roots. If you've battled

with weeds, you know that nailing the roots is the key to success.

More to like is the fact that Kleenup will not move through the soil and breaks down quickly after use. If you treat a large area like a flowerbed, you can reseed or plant in just seven days.

Finally, we think you'll like the fact that Kleenup contains "See Spray," a food grade color marker that will show you where you've applied the product . . . and prevent you from overspraying. This dye should be offered in a lot more garden products. It disappears in about an hour and won't stain walks, concrete, wood, brick or other materials.

To learn more about how to spend less time fighting weeds and more time loving your plants, see us soon.



SLOAT SPRING TIP:

Apply a slow release fertilizer now

Early spring is the perfect time to broadcast a slow-release fertilizer such as osmocote in your garden. The semi-permeable coating on the product releases fertilizers whenever it is moistened. A single application can last up to six months! Using Osmocote does not replace plant-specific feedings, but does provide a significant amount of food that all your plants will appreciate.

