

The Garden In May

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturist

I have become fond of the verse, *Earth laughs in flowers*. The verse is taken from several lines in Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem *Hamatreya* and when the lines are read in its entirety it has a less cheerful meaning than the brief verse signifies. This part of the stanza reads:

*Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
Earth-proud, proud of the Earth that is not theirs;
Who steer the plough but cannot steer their feet
Clear of the grave.*

To me, these verses refer to the belief that humanity, despite its frail mortality, owns the Earth. Yet it is the Earth, in its immortal greatness that owns us. The flowers laugh at our folly.

When the verses are taken out of context, however; it has a more sanguine meaning. It reminds me to live in the now and to celebrate random acts of beauty, which are often so fleeting. *Earth laughs in flowers* is an apt verse for the month of May, for spring is here in full swing. Gardens are bursting with floral abundance! The gray bleakness of winter is fast becoming a distant memory as we celebrate and embrace the sunshine, warmth and gladness that is May.

In the garden:

- Pick a bouquet and give it away. Typically, this is a May Day tradition, but I think it would be nice if there was more random flower giving. Who doesn't like receiving flowers now and then?
- Pinch back taller flowering perennials to create a sturdier and more bushy plant. I like to do this with tall garden Phlox, upright Sedums, and some asters. It does delay flowering a little bit, so keep that in mind.
- Keep up on pulling weeds and putting out slug bait.
- Fertilize Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Camellias, and Roses.
- Allow kale to flower. It's cheerful, attracts beneficial insects and it's edible. Add them to your bouquets!
- Sow sunflowers, beans, beets, carrots, arugula, lettuce, kale, chard, calendula, nasturtiums, radishes...
- Set out tomato, pepper, and squash starts, but hold off on basil unless you have a green house or a very warm protected spot in the garden.
- Thin the fruit on apple trees. Don't allow the tiny fruits to get larger than a walnut. Choose the largest apple in the cluster and remove everything else. Fruit thinning improves air circulation, helps to prevent apple scab, creates a larger more uniform apple, and reduces the weight load for the branches.