

April is the month to work on bulb plants

Begonia tubers should be planted in flats using a mixture of equal parts of peat moss and coarse sand. Press the tubers into the mixture, making sure that the growing leaf bud on the tuber is pointing upward.

Space the tubers two to three inches apart in the flat and keep them in a dark room at a temperature of 60-65 degrees F. In six weeks transplant the tubers to six inch pots or outdoors in a cool, lightly shaded area of the garden.

Dahlia tubers should be divided before spring planting if that hasn't already been done. Plant the tubers after the danger of frost is past and the soil has warmed enough to allow rapid growth.

If the dahlias will be planted in a clay soil, amend the heavy soil with peat moss or compost to give the plant a better growing condition. When planting, work 1/4 cupful of bone meal or 5-10-10 fertilizer into the bottom of the planting hole. Then add several inches of soil before putting the tuber in place.

If the dahlia is the tall, bushy type, support it against strong winds by staking.

April is usually the best time to take stored plant material out of storage and begin preparing it for the move outdoors.

Fuchsias, geraniums, and tuberous begonias and dahlias should be taken out of their storage containers and sorted and inspected in preparation for the spring growing season, says Ray McNeilan of Gresham, an Oregon State University Extension home gardening agent. Discard any plant material or tubers that have become moldy or diseased.

Prune the tops of potted fuchsias back to eight inches from the top of the pot. Then place them in a location indoors where they will get a lot of sunshine and warm temperatures. Water the plant only when needed. When outdoor temperatures are consistently above freezing, the fuchsia can be moved outdoors.

Potted geraniums should be handled the same way as fuchsias except that tops of geraniums should be pruned back to four inches from the top of the pot, McNeilan says.

The right improvements can add value to house

Perhaps you know a homeowner who needed more room for a growing family and opted for expansion to the attached garage. Now the car stays on the driveway while it snows and snows.

Unfortunately, as the cost of real estate swings higher, many people choose remodeling projects that will hinder the sale of their home later. Not every improvement will produce a dollars and cents result at closing time, nor should they. They aim of any improvement is to increase your family's comfort, first and add to resale value, second.

The four major home improvements; kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and family room, are also the most profitable come selling time. However, it is not advisable to undertake any of these projects with the idea of making a quick sale. A prospective buyer may have different tastes and habits or a do-it-yourself buyer would like a challenge and a bargain.

A word of caution on the do-it-yourself home remodeling job, the quality of workmanship determines the dollar value added. Even the best major improvements returns on 50-75 percent of cost.

Although no exact figures are available on the relationship of home improvements

and selling price, realtors, appraisers and financial institutions can advise you on valued improvements in your area. In some areas an attractive deck can clinch the sale. Fireplaces are profitable when then are free standing models. A two-car garage addition brings a financial return, but as we mentioned a garage conversion does not. Room additions that must be reached through another room create an awkward floor plan and add no sales value.

Before beginning any improvement, take an informal neighborhood survey. Find out how much more houses in your area sell for when they have the features you're planning to add compared to those without. It's important not to over improve for your neighborhood. Likewise, the style of your addition must fit the architecture of your home and blend well with the neighborhood. Your own well loved oddity may appear as a white elephant to a prospective buyer!

A few improvements result in no direct profit, but buyers have come to expect them an older home with a new roof, furnace or wiring indicates general good care. Energy savers are really popular today. Caulking, storm windows and doors, and insulation all rate high

with home shoppers.

There are minor improvements that help sell a home. These are not costly, but add to that important first impression. Realtors and appraisers agree that measures taken to help the property look well and prosperous favorably influence the sale. Attractive landscaping adds to resale value, but is usually taken for granted by buyers. Trees can reduce air conditioning costs. Shrubs trimmed to windowsill height in front and tall corner plantings 1/2 to 3/4 the height of the roof line improve the foundation appearance. A well cared for lawn attracts attention, however it takes only 3 or 4 years and a low investment to correct a failing lawn. Go slowly before making an investment in landscaping.

On the other hand, a general clean up always pays off. There are many minor improvements that help sell a home. Repair cracked plaster; wash dirty walls, paint interior and exterior where needed; fix broken tiles and leaky faucets; replace it with good basic beige or gold. A buyer will be distracted by anything very distinctive. Sylvia Porter says in her Money Book, \$100 spent for such improvements can return \$1,000 in the sale price.

Fluorescent lighting saves

Because it's easy to use more lighting than is needed around the house, most people try to save on their electric bill by conscientiously turning off lights.

Try attacking the problem from another angle, suggests Marilyn Lunner, Clackamas County Extension agent. Install energy-efficient fluorescent lighting fixtures.

The use of fluorescent lighting is the easiest way to save both money and energy. When fluorescent lighting is substituted for incandescent lighting in the home, savings on electrical energy frequently averages 45 percent and in some cases on record savings have been as high as 65 percent.

"Fluorescent lamps produce three to four times more light than incandescent lamps of the same wattage, and the fluorescent lamps last seven to 10 times longer," notes Sue Badenhop, Oregon State University Extension housing and management specialist.

"Although fluorescent light fixtures have been the standard for business and industry for years, most homeowners have hesitated to use them because of the limited selection of attractive fixtures," says Badenhop. Some people also object to the harsh effects of

the cool light from fluorescent tubes.

"However, newer fluores-

cent lights are now available that are suitable for most home lighting needs."

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