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## Easter: The Traditional Start of the Gardening Season

Get ready, get set, GARDEN. Everyone wants the first ripe tomato. Most years gardeners are biting at the bit and ready to garden, but many wait on the traditional start of the gardening season, Easter. However, Easter is early this year, and if the weather doesn't change we may have to give our crops an over-coat. Call it natural, spiritual or whatever. Easter is thought of as a new beginning. The beginning of spring, the beginning of growth, the beginning of life, and etc. It seems to be indwelt into our nature that nothing is planted until Easter. I guess this is why the Spring Flower Festival at the Pee Dee Farmers Market is always the week following Easter (March 31 – April 3) and draws some 50,000 people each year.

In some instances, planting at Easter is beneficial. First, in most years the threat of frost is generally past because our average last frost date is April 1st. However, this year Easter is the last Sunday in March, and I have seen frosts as late as April 19th. Next, planting early in the spring is very beneficial in South Carolina. It gets very hot quickly. Spring must be one of the few things unionized in S.C because many years it goes on strike and we head straight into summer. I jokingly tell most northerners that move here we have two seasons in S.C., summer and Christmas. Plants started early have a better chance of developing properly before it gets real hot. Finally, insects and disease problems are generally not as bad when you plant early. Most insect and disease problems tend to build and get worse throughout the summer. As summer progresses cornearworms, pickleworms, aphids, whiteflies, etc. are worse. Diseases like early blight, viruses, fungal leafspots, etc. increase. However, there are some noted exceptions to this generality.

In some instances, Easter is not the optimum time to plant. First of all, most trees, shrubs, and perennials do better if planted in the fall. Fall planting allows these plants to develop an adequate root system to stand heat the next summer. Next, cool season vegetables and ornamentals need to be planted in the fall or much earlier in the spring. One lady called about how she could keep her snapdragons and pansies from dying in the summer; however, since they are cool-season annuals this is natural. Finally, some plants do better if planted later when the soil is warm for the seed to germinate properly. These include okra, peanuts, cotton, and etc.

To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at [www.clemson.edu/florence](http://www.clemson.edu/florence) I may be contacted through our web site, [amelton@clemson.edu](mailto:amelton@clemson.edu) or 661-4800.

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