



## March Gardening Tips

The weather in March can be extremely variable. It can be as winter-like as January and February or as spring-like as April and May. Things like snow cover and day and nighttime temperatures will determine which of these garden tips will be appropriate.

### In the garden if there is no snow cover:

- **Check perennials for frost heaving.** Lightly press them back into the soil and cover with mulch if necessary.
- **Cut back ornamental grasses toward the end of the month before new growth begins.** To make this job more manageable, tie twine around the stand of stalks before you cut stems at the base. You will be left with a bundle to pick up instead of a mess.
- **Prune late-flowering clematis.** Clematis vines that don't bloom until mid-June can be pruned now. If you are trying to cover an arbor or trellis, just cut stems back to a healthy bud. If the vine has become a tangled mess or you haven't pruned your clematis at all in a few years, cut it back to a healthy bud at 12- to 18-inches from the ground. A few commonly-grown varieties to prune now include Blue Angel, Ernest Markham, Guernsey Cream, Henryi, Jackmanii, Nelly Moser, Will Goodwin and sweet autumn clematis.
- **Don't work the soil when it's wet.** As anxious as you are to start playing in your garden, you can destroy the structure of the soil if you start while it's still too wet. To determine if your soil is ready, pick up a handful and squeeze it. If the soil stays in a muddy ball when you open your hand, wait several days and try again. If the soil crumbles easily, you're ready to go.
- **Ensure your yellow and red-twig dogwoods will be just as bright next winter.** Older stems not only lose their color, they are also more susceptible to insect and disease. Remove one-third of the oldest stems ó cut them back all the way to the ground. Now is also a good time to correct the framework, too. Without leaves, it is much easier to see and remove branches growing in odd directions.
- **Remove the mulch from bulb plantings as soon as you see leaves poking through.** Toward the end of the month, begin pulling mulch away from plants as they begin showing signs of new growth. Gradually remove the mulch so plants can adjust to more light and air. Err on the side of caution ó it is much easier to remove the mulch a little later than to remove it too soon.
- **Toward the end of the month, begin cutting back perennials that weren't cut back last fall.** Put foliage in the compost pile, unless it was diseased.
- **Don't have a compost pile? Start one.** Compost improves the structure of the soil so that it can better retain nutrients, moisture and air. Compost also attracts and feeds earthworms, and plants grown in compost-enriched soil are more resistant to damage from insects and disease.

- If the soil is ready to be worked, plant seeds of peas, lettuce and radishes directly in the garden toward the end of the month. Onions sets can also be planted.
- Prune out diseased or damaged canes from raspberry plants before new growth starts.
- Prune grapevines.
- **Prune roses toward the end of the month.** The best time to prune roses is when the leaf buds have begun to swell, but before they have grown to 1/4 inch long. If you don't want to take a ruler out to the garden, let forsythia bushes tell you when the time is right. When they are in full bloom, it's time. While there are specific rules for pruning different types of roses, there are some general guidelines for pruning all roses:
  - ✓ First, use clean, sharp pruners.
  - ✓ Make cuts at a 45-degree angle just above (1/4") an outward-facing bud. Seal the ends of cuts with white glue to prevent cane borers.
  - ✓ Remove all dead, broken or damaged canes. Dead canes will appear dark brown or black or will be shriveled. Also remove canes that are smaller in diameter than a pencil.
  - ✓ Take a look at the overall shape of the rose. Remove canes that are growing in the wrong direction or those that are crossing through the middle of the plant. This will allow more light and air to reach through.
- When the soil temperature reaches 40 degrees, it's time to fertilize young trees and shrubs before new growth begins.
- Pick up sticks and limbs that have fallen from trees during the winter.
- **When the soil can be worked, divide summer- and fall-blooming perennials.** Dig up the entire plant and using a shovel or knife, cut the clump into sections. Replant in their new home as soon as possible.

#### **In the winter garden if there is still snow cover:**

- **If weather allows, monitor leafless trees and shrubs for scale insects.** They will be easier to spot without the cover of foliage. Spray with dormant oil before buds break if necessary if temperatures are at least 40 degrees.
- **Keep an eye out for the egg cases of the Eastern tent caterpillar.** Most often found on apple and crabapple, hawthorn and mountain ash, and flowering cherry trees, the egg cases look like shiny brown bands encircling twigs.
- **Inspect trees and shrubs periodically for damage from rabbits or deer.** If signs of assault are evident, wrap trunks with deer fencing or hardware cloth.
- Wait to prune spring-flowering trees until after they bloom.
- Prune summer and fall-blooming shrubs.
- **Apply a fungicide to trees with a recurring problem of apple scab.** There are many fungicides from which to choose ó just be sure to follow the directions on the product label.
- Avoid walking on the lawn if it is wet from melting snow.

**Wildlife:**

- Keep birdfeeders filled and provide birds with a source of fresh water.
- If you have a pond with goldfish or koi, make sure a pump continues to oxygenate water and an area stays unfrozen so gases can escape until the ice cover melts.

**Gardening indoors:**

- Grow microgreens in a sunny window.
- Plant seeds for broccoli and cauliflowers in early March. Herbs to plant in early March include chives, dill, sage and thyme.
- Plant seeds for tomatoes and peppers in mid-March.
- Prune and repot houseplants if needed. Begin fertilizing as new growth appears.
- Check on canna and dahlia tubers. Very lightly mist if they are drying out. Discard any damaged tubers.
- Periodically inspect houseplants for insect pests. Look for evidence of spider mites (webbing where leaves are attached to stems and stippled foliage), mealybugs (look like little cotton puffs) and whitefly (tiny, white moth-like insects on undersides of leaves).

**Gardening from the couch:**

- Check out the Plants page on our website. The 2015 plant lists have been posted so you can start your shopping list.
- Read garden books and magazines. They'll keep you inspired!
- Attend classes and seminars. Check newspapers, magazines and extension websites for events in your town.