

# **Monthly Gardening Calendar**

## **March, 2016**

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No gardening now but it is time to plan. Check last year's garden journal and your strategy for changes. Order seeds and plants before the hottest varieties sell out. No journal from last year, you say? Start this year's now to ward off your winter woes.

Get gardening information on-line at the UW-Extension Horticulture website at <http://hort.uwex.edu/> . Use the search box for keyword searches.

### **First Week**

Take bulbs out of cold storage for forcing as soon as they have had a long enough cold period. The smaller bulbs like hyacinth and crocus only need 8 weeks of cold while tulips and daffodils need 12 - 14. Paper white narcissus does not require this chilling so you can purchase them now to pot up and bloom yet this spring.

Tender bulbs of tuberous begonias, caladiums, dahlias, and canna lilies can be potted up in well-drained soil rich in organic matter. Discard any that have rotted in storage.

If you have been storing geraniums in cool, dark conditions, its time to pot them up, cut them back and start watering again.

Geraniums and coleus that you have kept growing indoors through the winter can be cut back to only a few buds. This will stimulate new growth and a fuller plant by the time summer arrives.

The longer days and shorter nights this time of year will stimulate houseplants to grow more rapidly again so you may resume fertilizing. Use fertilizers at only half-strength and only every other watering. If March is cloudy plants will still use less water and therefore less fertilizer.

Continue feeding your holiday plants like Christmas and Thanksgiving cacti, poinsettias, cyclamen, azalea and amaryllis. After flowering they start actively growing again and therefore need more nutrients.

### **Second Week**

The end of the dormant season is the best time to prune almost all trees and shrubs. Pines are about the only exception. Let their new growth expand until young needles are half of full size before pruning.

Spring flowering shrubs such as forsythia and lilac can be pruned now, too, unless you can't stand losing the flower buds on the stems you are removing. Otherwise you can wait

until immediately after flowering to prune. If overgrown, these shrubs can be rejuvenated by cutting all stems to the ground to stimulate new ones to emerge. This process must be done now and cannot be delayed until flowering is done.

Branches cut from spring flowering shrubs and fruit trees now can be brought in and put in warm water to force them into bloom.

Tree wound dressing or pruning paint are no longer recommended. These can actually slow the healing process.

Elm, maple, birch, and black walnut ooze sap when pruned in the spring due to water pressure from the moist soil. This will not harm the plant but if you are bothered by it you can prune these in early summer or late fall instead.

Some insect pests of trees and shrubs are best controlled by spraying with dormant oil. This includes scale insects of pine, lilac, and euonymus and many of the gall-forming insects. These insects or their eggs reside on the stems or needles and are smothered by the oil. Galls are mostly a cosmetic problem so no treatment is needed. Scales do weaken plants so they should be treated. When using dormant oil, check weather forecasts to be sure temperatures will stay above freezing for 8 - 12 hours after spraying to avoid causing damage to stems and needles.

Prune out and burn or bury the brown, shriveled "witches-brooms" on honeysuckle. The leaf-folding aphid that causes these overwinters in these growths. They feed on new growth as soon as the buds break in the spring. This one is hard to control since untreated honeysuckles are everywhere. This may be a good time to consider replacing honeysuckles with less invasive plants that have fewer pest problems.

Sow seed for parsley in pots on a bright window sill.

### **Third Week**

Make St. Patrick's Day a floral holiday with shamrocks and other assorted foliage plants. Kids get a kick out of making their own "Irish" carnations by using white carnations and a vase of green food coloring and water. At the same time they learn that plants draw up water and move it through the whole plant.

Start planning the vegetable garden. Consider including your children or grandchildren in the process this year.

Seeds of the following annual flowers can be started indoors: ageratum, wax begonia, browallia, dianthus and carnation, dusty miller, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, dwarf marigold, nierembergia, pansy, petunia, moss rose, snapdragons, and stocks. Be sure to use a sterile seed starting medium, supplemental lighting, and bottom heat for best results. Different species also have different requirements for light or darkness during germination. Check seed catalogs, seed packets or a reliable reference on-line for the requirements of the varieties you are growing.

Onions started from seed last month should be clipped to keep them at about 4 inches in height. Repeated cutting back diverts the plant's energy into bulb growth.

#### **Fourth Week**

Sow seeds indoors for the following vegetables: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, eggplant, and head lettuce.

Sow seeds indoors for the following flowers: alyssum, verbena, calendula, celosia, coleus, dahlia, phlox, and salvia.

Be mindful of warm days when the sun can cause heat to build-up under rose cones, in cold frames and other plant protection systems. However, it is still too early to remove mulches from plants with tender new tissue forming.

Examine lawn areas where water may have pooled or snow cover lingered. Snow mold fungus may develop in these areas. Also look for meadow mouse tunnels in the browned grass. Both can be improved by roughing up the affected area with a rake to encourage the adjacent healthy grass plants to fill in.

Take your lawnmower in for servicing to avoid the rush at the repair shop on that first nice weekend of April. Get it tuned up, the oil changed, and tighten all bolts. At the very least, get the blade sharpened.

On nice days, go outside and turn the compost pile. This will get it "cooking" again. Hopefully, it will also help you resist the urge to start working the soil too soon. If the soil is too wet you will create rock hard clods that could persist all year long.

During inclement weather, clean-up and sharpen garden tools and prepare other gardening equipment for the busy months ahead. Inventory pesticides, fertilizers, bags of potting soil and amendments. Finish up last year's records.

Keep dreaming and planning for the best gardening season ever.