

# G A R D E N E R S , D O N Y O U R G L O V E S

*And get into gardening season with these spring tips*

## M A R C H

- ☛ When starting a new lawn, add and mix in soil conditioners and fertilizers. Conditioners improve soil by increasing moisture and fertilizer holding capacity. Organic materials that can be used as soil conditioners include old sawdust, cotton gin waste, peanut hulls and sewer sludge.
- ☛ Trees like to be transplanted before the end of March. In mid-and-upper South, April is satisfactory.
- ☛ When planting trees, make the planting hole at least two feet deeper and wider than the ball. It's helpful to add some peat moss mixed with soil.
- ☛ Spring marks fertilizing time for evergreen trees and shrubs as well as deciduous trees and shrubs that didn't receive fall feedings. Individual shrubs need two to four cups of complete fertilizer, such as 5-10-10, 8-8-8 or 10-6-4. Small plants need less; large plants need more. Rake back mulch, apply fertilizer and replace mulch.
- ☛ Plant moon vine (*Calonyction aculeatum*) after the last hard freeze for beautiful, perfumed white flowers that open at night.
- ☛ On mild days, move houseplants outdoors to a semi-shaded spot for a few hours to let them acclimate to the upcoming outdoor vacation.
- ☛ Sow the seeds of certain flowering annuals directly into well-prepared flowerbeds. These include: alyssum, poppy, cornflower, globe amaranth, and strawflower, which is popular for dried arrangements in winter.
- ☛ Start bedding plants indoors for late planting outside. In a few weeks, these slow-to-bloom annuals will be available at garden centers: candytuft, rudbeckia, verbena and gaillardia.
- ☛ Till your vegetable garden now. Organic matter and compost piled on soil during winter months need to be turned under. Along with liberal amounts of complete fertilizer (unless a soil test shows the need for a special mix), this provides a good area for growing vegetables. After prepar-



ing the ground, set out cabbages, collard plants, Irish potatoes and onions. Sow seeds of mustards, radishes, chives, English peas, leaf lettuce, beets, carrots, radishes, chard, kale, spinach, including New Zealand spinach, and turnips. Wait another month for the soil to warm up before planting seedlings of eggplants, peppers and tomatoes.

- ☛ After planting strawberries, pinch off any blooms that appear the first year to concentrate energy toward developing strong roots and runners. Next year, plants will be established enough to produce a quality crop.

## A P R I L

- ☛ It's a good time to plant corn, snap beans, okra and squash. Also set transplants of tomatoes and sweet peppers.
- ☛ Herbs generally grown for culinary use are: chives, lemon basil, dill, marjoram, rosemary, mint, lemon verbena, sweet basil, summer savory, peppermint and sage.
- ☛ If vegetables are allowed to overmature in the garden, plants will go into a rest period. Continue to pick pole beans, okra, squash and cucumbers. A bonus is that small, young vegetables are tastier to the palate.
- ☛ Perennial vegetables such as thorny asparagus and Jerusalem artichokes are planted just once, but harvested for years to come.
- ☛ If you've not grown fruit before, strawberries and blueberries are good starter plants that require little or no chemicals.
- ☛ Consider adding heirloom plants to your garden. Often among the most carefree and hardy of plants, unlike newer varieties, these time-tested favorites have had decades or even hundreds of years to adapt to local growing conditions.
- ☛ After a few years of growth, forsythia plants tend to decline in flower production. It is helpful to apply a cup of 5-10-5 commercial fertilizer this month.
- ☛ When two or three sets of leaflets are visible on seedlings in a seed container, they may be transplanted to individual pots for further growth.

- ☛ When grown as potted plants, hydrangeas tend to become root bound if left in the same pot for several years. Hydrangeas grow best and produce more blooms in the open.
- ☛ Keep grass away from tree trunks for the first few years. Competition with grasses can reduce root growth of young trees by as much as 50 percent.
- ☛ Never disturb the root system of a tree. Any digging or hoeing, which damages roots, can slow tree growth considerably.
- ☛ Apply an extra layer of mulch such as pine straw or pine bark to newly planted trees and shrubs. This reduces evaporation, helps roots adjust, and slows down weed growth in the spring.
- ☛ Intermixing marigolds and nasturtiums with vegetables will discourage nematodes and side shoots growing from main shoots.
- ☛ Flowers for heavy shade include: impatiens (patience plant), sultana, Vinca rosea (Madagascar periwinkle), wax begonia, foxglove, lobelia, basalm, nemophilia (baby-blue eyes) and godetia.
- ☛ During growing season, control size and encourage development of a compact plant by keeping long, wispy growth pruned back.
- ☛ It's safest to rotate the location of annuals year after year, as with tomatoes. A three-year rotation, using unrelated plants, helps control soil-borne diseases.
- ☛ Repair thin or bare lawn spots in play areas or other spots subject to heavy traffic. If the spot is too thin, loosen soil several inches deep with a spading fork. This allows air, water and fertilizer to move into the soil.
- ☛ The best and easiest to grow of the flowering perennial vines include: hybrid clematis, autumn clematis, silver-lace vine, honeysuckle, wisteria and trumpet creeper.
- ☛ Lantanas are effective groundcovers for steep slopes; they are also a good choice for stone walls. These plants prefer full sun and fertile soil.



**M A Y**

- ☛ Great annual vines include cypress vine, black-eyed Susan vine and vining nasturtium.
- ☛ Keep small clematis plants in pots for the first year, either above ground or buried to give young roots a cozier place to start. Prune new transplants to the lowest pair of strong buds.
- ☛ You don't have to step on a rusty nail to get tetanus. Tetanus bacteria lurk in garden soil—all it takes is a cut, scrape or splinter to invite infection. It's easy to avoid this potentially deadly disease: Make sure you are vaccinated at least every 10 years.



- ☛ Such native perennials as purple coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, phlox, verbenas and bee balm are premium butterfly flowers, and as a bonus are no-fuss.
- ☛ Salvias are irresistible to hummingbirds: Try pineapple sage, which has red blooms in early fall, and black-and-blue salvia, with flowers of rich dark-blue throughout summer.
- ☛ Refrain from deadheading some of your purple coneflowers, and you'll tempt goldfinches to visit the porcupine-like seed cones.
- ☛ Electric push mowers are less messy than gas mowers and start at the flip of a switch. These mowers are inexpensive to operate (\$3–\$6 a year)

and environmentally friendly.

- ☛ Improper mowing not only leaves a bad-looking lawn, but it's an invitation to weeds, diseases and other problems. Evenness of cut is essential to good looks. Mowing height and frequency are essential for good health.
- ☛ Turf specialists recommend mowing often enough to remove about a half-inch, or no more than one-third of the green leaf surface.
- ☛ If eggplants and bell peppers are among family favorites, plant two or three plants of each. They take up relatively little space and bear until frost.
- ☛ Cutworms can cause severe damage to tomato plants. Gardeners have used milk cartons, pieces of wax paper wrapped around stems and aluminum foil to protect young plants.
- ☛ These shade-loving herbs are adapted to growth on the north side of buildings or other shady spots: liverwort, red baneberry, blue cohosh, cardinal flower, ginseng, dutchman's breeches, maidenhair fern, goldenseal, Jack-in-the-Pulpit and mountain laurel.
- ☛ Choice perennials for sunny spots include daylilies, hardy hibiscus, ornamental grasses, blue false indigo (Baptista australis), Russian sage (Perovskia sp.), "Autumn Joy" sedum, "Goldstrum," black-eyed Susan, bloody cranebil (Geranium sanguineum), and crocosmia. Good choices for shady spots include hostas, Japanese roof iris (Iris tectorum), Lenten roses, ferns, Japanese anemone, and variegated fragrant Solomon's Seal (Polygonatum odoratum).
- ☛ May through September is a critical period for azaleas and camellias. Soil around roots should never be allowed to become completely dry. Water slowly with a soil soaker once a week during hot dry weather, more often if soil dries out quickly.
- ☛ Remove faded blooms when they appear on bedding plants and shrubs. ①

*Tips taken from past gardening guide columns by Hank Smith and Carla Burgess.*