

## Early Signs of Spring

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If you know where to look, the first signs of spring have started to peek out. Day length is closing in on 12 hours, we've had a couple of record breaking warm days, and the frost depth is quickly rising. Separately or combined these provide cues for some plants to come out of winter dormancy. While this is exciting for us to see, sometimes the plant's reactions are not what we want from them.

Bulbs, especially those that have been in the ground for over a year, may start popping up. The tallest tulips I've seen so far are up about 2" and give them a warm day they might double that easily. Exciting, yes! Potentially problematic down the road? Also yes! Crocus will push through snow to show off their blooms because that's what crocus do. But tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths are not as "snow tough" and can freeze. If it's just the leaves freezing the plant may look a little ragged but should still bloom, but if the flower stem freezes it won't be able to flower this spring. So if you do have tulips coming up already and are concerned about losing their blooms for the year, temporarily pile a couple inches of mulch completely covering the exposed leaves thereby protecting them from freezing temperatures.



The warmer days melted most of the snow and if your lawn looks like mine, all of the buried leaves are now exposed. There may also be a few tiny green shoots coming up too. The immediate reaction to seeing the leaves is to grab a rake and start collecting. However that may not be the best idea. Too many leaves will trap moisture and that moisture combined with organic material causes molds and rot to develop. Certainly no one wants that, but at the same time eliminating the mold and rot must be balanced against protecting the very tender new green growth that cannot handle the physical effects of raking. So in open areas with a few leaves on the grass, raking will probably create more problems than it would solve so wait for another day. But if there's an area of your lawn that collects leaves and right now has a thick layer of leaves, gently raking the leaves up might be very beneficial. But be very, very gentle!

Finally, there may be a few trees that are starting to form and even break bud. Frost or freeze damage on trees can happen any year and there's not much anyone can do to prevent this. For fruit trees bud damage could mean no fruit production for the year. Commercial growers sometimes overhead spray on nights when the temperatures dip well below freezing, using the energy (heat) released when water freezes to protect their crop. This is not practical for the average homeowner so if the tree is small enough hopefully a sheet will suffice. That's about as best as one can do for existing fruit trees, but for future trees plant only mid- or late-blooming varieties to avoid as much late frost damage as possible.

It's not quite spring yet but we are getting closer!!

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