



“From the Potting Shed”

Riverview Garden Club - Helpful Hints

March 2025

Longer days and warming temperatures remind us that spring is finally coming after our very cold and snowy winter. But don't be too eager to dig in the dirt! The soil needs to thaw and warm before planting. Here are some tips to help you plan and prep your garden for a successful growing season.

Things to do this month...

Planning

- Choose new planting areas based on exposure to sun, shade and wind and consider the distance from water source
- Test Soil - Spring is a great time to do a soil test on garden beds. This is an important step with new planting areas but also with established ones and more so if you haven't taken a soil test in a while. The test measures things like soil pH and some nutrients, including phosphorus, potassium and calcium. Results include recommendations of what you should add to soil such as lime and/or fertilizer.

Chores and Maintenance

- As soil thaws and dries, carefully remove winter mulches from planting beds
- Dig beds in preparation for spring planting as soon as “the soil is workable.” That means you should wait until soil warms up to the ideal temperature for whatever you're planting. It also means that soil shouldn't be overly wet like it often is with winter rains or snow. The ideal soil texture for planting is crumbly. When you squeeze a handful of soil, it should crumble apart easily.

- Turn compost - Once the compost pile thaws, use a pitchfork and try to turn it a bit, adding any fresh material you have. Use “finished compost” as a top dressing around clematis, roses, raspberries and blackberries.
- Remove protective cover from evergreens
- Reset any plants that heaved in the frost
- Apply horticultural oil sprays to dormant trees and shrubs before buds open and if there is no danger of night frost

Pruning and Fertilizing:

- Prune all plant materials to remove any damaged, diseased, dead, weak or crossing branches
- Complete tree pruning before new growth begins
- Prune late-flowering shrubs such as buddleia and hydrangea paniculata but wait until after flowering on early flowering shrubs such as forsythia, hydrangea macrophylla, rhododendron and lilac
- Wait to prune evergreens, hedges and other shrubs until late spring into early summer
- Prune all fruit trees before growth begins
- Prune hybrid tea roses, floribunda and grandiflora roses, but wait until after flowering on climbers and ramblers
- Cut back ornamental grasses to allow for new shoots
- Fertilize deciduous, broad-leaved and needle-leaved evergreens if not fed in the fall
- Fertilize spring bulbs as their tips appear

Prune Roses

- Late winter/early spring is the ideal time for rose pruning. Always remove dead, diseased or damaged stems (called canes), cutting back to a bud on healthy wood. Remove canes that rub on each other when the wind blows. To choose which cane to remove, look at the canes closely. If the bark on one is already damaged, remove it. If one is growing more toward the center of the shrub, remove it. Also, shorten rose canes as needed to control plant size.

Spruce Up Houseplants

- Begin to transplant pot bound houseplants
- Continue to inspect for pests and control as needed
- Cut back leggy houseplants
- Snip and remove any dead leaves or stems.
- If plants don't need to be repotted, consider replacing the top half- to one inch of soil with fresh potting mix.
- Give plants that don't have hairy leaves a gentle spritz from a hand sprayer filled with distilled, room-temperature water. It's best to do this over a sink, where overspray won't hurt surfaces.

Force Branches Indoors

- Prune a few branches from some flowering shrubs and trees to bring a breadth of spring into your home!
- Make a clean cut and arrange the branches in a vase of clean water to force an early bloom. The following are great sources: Forsythia, Dogwood, Flowering Cherry or Pear Trees, Magnolia, Pussy willow, Flowering Fruit Trees

Tend to Tools and Accessories

- Start cleaning containers and pots so they are ready for planting. Rinse with a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.
- Start your lawn mower, check to see if it needs service, and get the blades sharpened.
- Clean and sharpen garden tools. Take an inventory of supplies you will need for the upcoming growing season.

Happy Spring Gardening!

Resources:

Julie Martens Forney, HGTV Magazine, "Gardening To-Do List for March", August 2024.

New York Botanical Garden, Plant and Research Guides, "Spring Gardening Chores: March".

University of Connecticut, Home and Garden Education Center, "March Gardening Tips".