



“From the Potting Shed”

Riverview Garden Club – Helpful Hints

February 2024

With longer daylight hours, you may be eager to get out into your garden, but there’s still more winter weather ahead! This month it’s best to focus on ordering seeds and bulbs, cleaning and sharpening tools, assessing and prepping seed starting supplies and caring for indoor plants.

Also, it’s important to note that in November 2023, the USDA released an updated version of the Plant Hardiness Zone Map, marking the first update since 2012. The update is based on 30-year averages of the lowest annual winter temperatures across the country. According to the updated zone map, the Wayne/Pequannock/Lincoln Park area is hardiness zone 7a. Kinnelon/Butler area remains in zone 6b.

Things to do this month...

Fertilizing the Garden

February is a great time to add some slow-release organic fertilizer around your shrubs and garden beds.

Assessing Garden Tools and Supplies

If you haven’t done so already, be sure that you assess your tools for sharpening and cleaning needs. The lawnmower should receive a fluid change as well. It’s best to get all of your gardening supplies in tip-top shape so that when spring rolls in, you are fully prepared for yard and garden work, so you do not have any setbacks.

Check your garden tools for disrepair signs, tune-up and thoroughly clean and sanitize, sharpen blades, and oil up moving parts. It is also essential to keep your garden free from diseases that may have plagued your garden last season.

Tips for Garden Tool Tune-up

1. Start by using steel wool or a metal grill brush to clean any debris off your garden tools.
2. Wipe surfaces with a damp rag.
3. Use coarse sandpaper to scuff away any signs of rust on metal surfaces.
4. Dab vegetable oil onto a rag and wipe metal surfaces.
5. Use a piece of sandpaper to slough away any rough or splintering spots on wooden handles.
6. Wipe wooden handles down with a rag wet with linseed oil.

Winter Composting

One of the best things you can do for your garden is to create a compost system. After all, healthy gardens begin with a nutrient rich soil structure. If you have a compost pile already established, you'll be able to reap the rewards of the black gold that is made of decomposed organic materials. Your gardens will be enriched when you amend your soil with this rich planting material. When you rake out and trim back your perennial gardens, add this garden debris to your compost heap. Continue to add kitchen scraps and pine needles and turn your pile with a pitchfork.

Indoor Planting

Changes are happening for your indoor plants as well as your outdoor ones. Take time this February to repot your indoor houseplants. The sun is higher in the sky, and your indoor plants should be ready for growing strong. You do not need to get all new pots unless, of course, your indoor plants have outgrown their containers. You can feed your indoor plants as well at this time to ensure optimal growth.

- Remove the houseplant from the pot.
- Shake off loose soil from the plant.
- Fill the pot with new potting mix and reposition the plant.
- Add some organic slow-release fertilizer.
- Give plants a thorough watering session. Consider a shower watering, which will clean the plant's leaves and give the roots a good soaking.
- Allow the potted plants to drain water and set them in their sunny location.

Starting Seeds Indoors

Before starting seeds indoors, it's crucial to identify your growth zone's last frost date. This date varies with each zone and is just an estimation. The last frost date is essential because this is how you will calculate days backward from the last estimated frost date so they will be ready for outdoor planting.

Zone 6– estimated last frost date of April 30, which means you can start planting seeds indoors in early March.

Zone 7– estimated last frost date of April 15, which means you can start planting seeds indoors in late February.

For zone 7, you can begin planting warm-season crops indoors by the end of the month of February.

For more seed starting information, check out these “how to” videos! Jennifer Howell, Garden Gate Magazine Editor and Garden Manager, offers tips for starting seeds indoors and how to make your own seed starting pots!

“The Basics of Seed Starting”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcplgvZdAuk>

“DIY Seed Starting Pots”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhURJyMDdPc>

Sources:

“Winter Gardening: February Garden Checklist – Zones 6,7,8”, Grow Your Gardening Skills, Kellogg Garden Products.

Garden Gate Magazine, YouTube Videos.

Happy Indoor Gardening!