



“From the Potting Shed”

Riverview Garden Club - Helpful Hints March 2024

Punxsutawney Phil predicted an early spring on Ground Hog Day 2024! We're hopeful that his prediction was accurate this year. While we're awaiting the First Day of Spring on March 19th, here are a few early spring gardening chores to add to your “To Do” list. Be patient spring is coming!

Things to do this month...

PRUNE TREES AND SHRUBS

- If you haven't already done so, finish pruning small trees and shrubs early this month before they break dormancy. Complete tree pruning before new growth begins.
- Prune fruit trees until buds begin to swell. Remove suckers from fruiting trees.
- Dormant spraying for fruit trees should be done before spring growth begins. Choose a calm day when temperatures are above 40 degrees F, and be sure to cover all sides of the branches.
- Maple and birch should not be pruned until they leaf out. Choose a day above freezing, if possible, as it is easier on you as well as on the tree!
- Remove any diseased, dead, weak or crossing branches.
- Prune summer-flowering trees and shrubs. Prune spring-flowering shrubs only after they finish blooming.
- Wait to prune evergreens, hedges and other shrubs until late spring into early summer

START GARDEN CLEAN-UP

- Don't walk or work in soggy soil, or trod on frozen lawns unnecessarily as this can cause compaction of the soil.
- As the ground begins to dry, remove any leaves and debris from your lawn.
- When ready to begin clean-up, gently clear debris off beds that hold the earliest bloomers first, like areas where bulbs are trying to push up through leaves or where trilliums and other spring ephemerals are growing.
- Acclimate your plants by removing the mulch over a period of days, allowing the light and air to reach the new growth slowly. It is much better to remove the mulch a little later than to remove it too early.
- Cut back old foliage of European ginger, hellebores, and Epimedium which will soon be replaced with a fresh flush. Plants with early blooms will look much better without the old dried leaves.

- Cut down ornamental grasses to prevent mice and other rodents from nesting among the leaves. Trim grasses back to a height of 6 inches before they begin greening.
- For evergreen grasses such as Carex (sedge), blue oat grass, Mexican feather grass, and sweet flag, it's best to tease out dead stems. Wear a pair of latex-coated garden gloves and comb your fingers through the clumps. Dead stems should stick to the gloves and come out easily.
- Resist the temptation to uncover spring-flowering plants such as daffodils and tulips. Mulch may be loosened, but the shoots will still benefit from protection against cold, drying winds.
- Keep plastic milk jugs or other coverings on hand to protect the flowers of pansies, crocuses, and other early bloomers against the return of severe weather.
- Plant primroses and pansies in containers for early spring color!

CARE FOR ROSES

- If you have roses, slowly unwrap and remove protective mulch to awaken them.
- Prune hybrid tea roses, floribunda and grandiflora roses, but wait until after flowering on climbers and ramblers

START SEEDS INDOORS

- Be sure that flats and pots used for starting seeds are perfectly clean. You can sterilize with a solution of 10 percent bleach and 90 percent water.
- Start seeds of some herbs in flats, such as basil, parsley, sage, and thyme. Once the seeds germinate, place the plants under grow lights for 14 hours a day and keep soil moist.
- Start some vegetables in flats inside under lights: Brussel sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, and lettuce are good choices. Use moistened seed-starting mix. Fertilize when two sets of leaves have grown.
- Start seedlings of annuals in flats — aster, larkspur, alyssum, snapdragons, and petunias should be started now or 6 to 8 weeks before the last frost date. Check seed packets for any special planting instructions.
- Water newly started seedlings carefully. Try using a mister or a meat basting syringe, which will dispense the water without disturbing the soil too much.

PREPARE THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

- Spread dark plastic intended for mulch out over the garden site to hasten the warming of the soil. This will provide for earlier and better germination.
- Ideally, seeds need 70 to 75 degrees F temperatures to germinate, and 60 to 65 degrees F temperatures to grow.
- Sow peas outdoors, even if it's snowy! The earlier they mature, the sweeter they'll be. Sow them as soon as the soil can be worked, but save some for a later planting as well. Choose a location that gets maximum sun.
- Start sowing seeds of edibles that thrive in cooler weather including radishes, carrots, beets, kohlrabi, turnips, mustard greens. To keep the harvest coming over a longer time period, practice succession planting: sowing a few seeds every 7-10 days.
- Plant bulbing onions as soon as you can work in the soil.

Sources:

Gardening Know How, "Early Spring Garden Checklist"

The Old Farmer's Almanac, "Planting Guide for Wayne, NJ"

Happy Spring and Happy Gardening!