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## *Your Indoor Outdoor guide to gardening* **MARCH**

### **SEED STARTING**

If you are new to seed starting, you'll find by sticking to a few basic guidelines, how rewarding and fascinating it can be to observe the progression from tiny green stems unearthing their heads, to growth into a mature plant, producing the flowers or vegetables you've anticipated.

Each seed falls within one of three sowing categories: direct sowing outdoors since they may not transplant well or may benefit from initial exposure to cold temperatures; starting indoors since a longer growing season is needed before flowering or fruiting; lastly, those that do equally well sown indoors or out.

Let's discuss the indoor category in detail. The following sowing date schedules is a general guide, but refer to each seed packet for specific requirements: annual flowers 6 to 8 weeks before the frost free date (FFD) of your area, annual vegetables 2 to 8 weeks before the FFD, and perennial flowers 8 to 12 weeks before FFD.

Calculate your sowing date by counting backwards from the frost-free date designated for your area. If you are a beginner, an almost fool-proof method of seed raising is to use a windowsill kit. For a few dollars you will have purchased everything necessary to begin sowing. Most kits resemble egg cartons, complete with sterile, soilless media and fertilizer. Refer to the kit's instructions for general recommendations and to each seed packet for specific information about the particular plants you are going to sow.

Here are some tips: label each seedling; sow twice as much as you need; never use garden soil because it isn't sterile or lightweight enough; use the outside top of the refrigerator until germination occurs since seeds prefer a soil temperature range of 70° to 75°F to germinate; after germination, seedling's require 12 -14 hours of light daily; be aware of any pretreatments necessary for a particular seed such as cold treatment (refrigeration), scarification (nicking seeds with a sharp knife) and moisture treatment (soaking in water); also, some seeds require light, while others require darkness for germination to occur; prior to outdoor planting, harden off the plants by bringing them outdoors for increasingly longer periods for a week or more; refer to a book or the internet as a guide as your interest "grows"; and most of all – have FUN!

By Leeza Fox, Penn State Master Gardener

### **FLOWERING THIS MONTH**

- ❖ Early bulbs: Crocus, snowdrops, crested iris, daffodils, early tulips.
- ❖ Wildflowers: common spring beauty, Christmas rose, liverleaf, Virginia bluebells, mayapple, red trillium, white trillium.
- ❖ Garden plants: rock cress
- ❖ Shrubs: Korean abelia-leaf, fragrant winter-hazel, February Daphne, spring heath, Forsythia, spicebush, Japanese andromeda, sweetbox, fragrant Viburnum.
- ❖ Trees: sugar maple, Cornelian cherry, American filbert, witch-hazel, cherry, pussy willow.

## **SEASONAL**

- ❖ Prepare soil for planting. Do not till your soil if it is wet, it should crumble in your hand.
- ❖ Have soil tested or just last fall's soil test recommendations.
- ❖ When buying transplants, select ones with a compact, bushy form and bright green leaves. Plants without flowers or flower buds produce better and grow faster.
- ❖ Sharpen and repair garden tools.

## **HOUSEPLANTS**

- ❖ Root cuttings of your favorite houseplants to increase your supply of plants.
- ❖ Begin fertilizing your plants after new growth appears.
- ❖ Repot houseplants that are pot bound.

## **BULBS**

- ❖ Fertilize spring flowering bulbs.
- ❖ Check any stored bulbs for decay; discard damaged bulbs.

## **COMPOST**

- ❖ Clean up any dead stems or leaves left from last fall and add them to a new compost pile.
- ❖ Turn your old compost pile to restart the composting process. Add nitrogen and water to boost the process.
- ❖ Spread compost over garden and landscape.

## **VEGETABLE GARDENS**

- ❖ Plan carefully to be able to harvest spring, summer and fall. Plant for your needs for example 2-3 tomato plants per family member will supply fresh tomato needs, Add more plants if you are canning or making juice.
- ❖ Remember that it takes about 2 hours per week to care for 20' x 50' garden, not including harvesting and planting.
- ❖ Begin planting cool-weather crops as soon as the ground can be worked; include lettuce, broccoli, and spinach, under row covers or in cold frames. Check your outside planting date and count back to the appropriate sowing date, as plants do best when on the younger side of the transplant age.
- ❖ Mow any cover crops and turn under the residue at the end of March.
- ❖ Asparagus ferns should be cut back if new spears have not yet emerged. Side dress with nitrogen or manure.

## **SMALL FRUITS**

- ❖ Observe plants for disease and pest problems to catch them early. Be mindful of diseases that occurred last year, now will be the time to treat for some of them.
- ❖ Early March is premium time for pruning brambles, blueberries and grapes.
- ❖ Fertilize brambles and blueberries.
- ❖ If mummy berry (mature berries are hard and shriveled, rather than plump & juicy) was a problem on blueberries last year, then spray with a fungicide 3 times, 7-10 days apart, at the beginning of bud break.
- ❖ If black rot (grapes shrivel and dry up like raisins, and are never plump or juicy) was a problem last year, then spray with a home orchard spray beginning when shoots are only 6" long; continue at 10-14 day intervals until grapes are mature.

## **TREE FRUITS & NUTS**

- ❖ Begin dormant oil, fungicide, and insecticide sprays on fruit trees. Not spraying as needed can result in disease insect problems later.
- ❖ Remove mulch from strawberries when growth begins, but keep it nearby for frost and freezes.
- ❖ If planting raspberry plants, start with 6-10 plants. Since they send out underground runners, install an 8-12" sheet on metal vertically all around the raspberry bed.

## **HERBS**

- ❖ Start annual, biennial and perennial plants for the garden and for use as indoor plants.
- ❖ Purchase plants of hard germinate types such as rosemary and lavender.

## **LAWNS**

- ❖ Remove winter debris from the lawn.
- ❖ Avoid over-fertilizing lawns in the spring. Too much fertilizer will increase lawn disease problems and will cause top growth at the expense of root growth.
- ❖ If some areas of your lawn do not green –up with the rest, check for disease or insect problems.
- ❖ When the Forsythia begins to bloom, apply pre-emergent herbicide to lawns. Spot spray for dandelions, henbit and chickweed.
- ❖ If irrigation water is available, lawns can be seeded or over-seeded, with cold-season grasses (Kentucky bluegrass, dwarf fescue, perennial ryegrass).
- ❖ Damaged to lawns form sod webworm begins at this time. Check for the insect and treat if necessary. If birds are feeding on them from your lawn, that may be enough control.
- ❖ Thatching and aerification of lawns can reduce soil compaction; this is a good time to renovate lawns. Special equipment is needed for this; hire a professional or rent the equipment.
- ❖ Do not use lawn equipment on soft or soggy lawns; it compacts soil and damages the roots.

## **PERENNIALS, BIENNIALS & ANNUALS**

- ❖ Sow seeds indoors of marigolds, impatiens and tender perennials.
- ❖ Cold tolerant annuals can be sown outdoors as soon as the soil can be worked. These include: alyssum, California poppy, candytuft, larkspur, pansy, Phlox, pinks, Shirley poppy, snapdragon, stock, sweet pea, and viola.
- ❖ Begin to divide and transplant perennials.
- ❖ Spray peonies occasionally with a contact fungicide as they emerge from the soil. This will help reduce disease problems that would destroy the flower buds later.
- ❖ Vinca can be sheared back with a rotary lawn mower.
- ❖ Cut ornamental grasses to 3-5" above ground.

## **TREES & SHRUBS**

- ❖ Prune off deadwood. Do not prune in damp or wet weather.
- ❖ Fertilize conifers with a top dressing of manure or 5-10-5 fertilizer.
- ❖ Fertilize ornamental deciduous trees and shrubs.
- ❖ Prune summer flowering shrubs. Wait until after they flower to prune spring flowering shrubs. Do not prune in damp or wet weather.
- ❖ Plant new deciduous and coniferous trees.
- ❖ Young trees can be protected from string trimmer and mower damage with short (9-10' tall) plastic tree guards.
- ❖ If you had powdery mildew on lilac, roses, other woody plants, rake up leaves from around the affected plants.
- ❖ Spray shade trees if ten caterpillars, webworms, or leafrollers were a problem last year.
- ❖ Remove tree wraps from young trees.
- ❖ Hedges can be pruned after growth starts, leave the base of the plants wider than the tops.

## **ROSES**

- ❖ Remove deadwood and damaged canes; pruning should be at an angle above a dormant bud. Avoid pruning until one week prior to the last killing frost.
- ❖ Spray roses with lime-sulfur.
- ❖ Fertilize with an organic fertilizer.

## **WATER GARDENS**

- ❖ Remove leaves and debris.

❖ Check soil in pots and replace as needed.