

MARCH TO DO LIST

- Please note, most of the information shared here was obtained from Research-based sources (see contributors acknowledgements below), and from individuals who are considered very knowledgeable on a particular subject. While some little tidbits here may be of interest, they should be taken "with-a-grain-of-salt".

(compiled by MG Brian D. Townsend)

"I have found, through years of practice, that people garden in order to make something grow; to interact with nature; to share, to find sanctuary, to heal, to honor the earth, to leave a mark. Through gardening, we feel whole as we make our own personal work of art upon our land." - Julie Moir Messervy, The Inward Garden

1st WEEK:

Depending on the weather, yearling Purple Martins should begin to start arriving now through the rest of the month, looking for nesting sites to colonize. Houses should be cleaned and ready to go up. No matter what, keep the housing up through June, martins may arrive and begin nesting as late as the end of June. - *PMA*

The first of March is typically the last frost date, but we have gotten nipped as late as the first week of April. - *SB*

The first few days of this month is the last call for planting bare-root dormant rose bushes. They can be planted later with success, but they will not grow off as quickly or as well. - *AJW*

Last chance to apply pre-emergent herbicides and receive their full benefit. Remember to water them in lightly.

Still time to mow/cut well established Asian Jasmine, liriop and mondograss, feed with a slow-release lawn food (never use a weed & feed).

Harvest spinach, leaf lettuce, collars and other greens one leaf at a time as you need them for salads.

To revitalize your lawn, aerate and top-dress your lawn now with a 1/2 inch of compost.

Rather than pruning pear trees, use spacers to spread branches at a 60 degree angle. Pruning pear trees heavily stimulates vegetation rather than fruit.

Fertilize fruit trees with 1 cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter. Spread it around the drip line. - *CF*

Divide summer and fall blooming perennials, including cannas, mallows, fall asters, mums and perennial salvias.

It's too early to fertilize lawns. Instead, aerate and top-dress with compost. - *EO*

Prune the tallest, thinnest canes of nandina to 2" to encourage thicker bushes. - *TAE*

Complete all transplanting of trees and shrubs. Water well until roots have had time to establish. - *LR*

"Scalp" lawn as needed to remove browned winter stubble. Set mower down 1 or 2 notches, and wear quality respirator and goggles. Don't confuse this with dethatching, which is rarely recommended.

Fertilize pecans with 21-0-0 or other high-nitrogen fertilizer on 30-day intervals early March through early May. - *NS*

When you see migrating birds flying low, you can be sure that bad weather is approaching. For successful migration, birds need a strong tail wind and in calm weather there is no head

wind so they can fly high. If a storm is approaching, the winds change as well as the air pressure, and migrating birds then drop very low.

Avoid those weed and feed products that you see advertised each spring because both of these activities should be done at different times. If you have a weed problem, consider using a safer, natural solution like corn gluten meal. When it comes to fertilizer, organic and natural products are healthier for your lawn and the environment. - TGS

"Longer days are here again!!!" - (me)

THE 60 MINUTE GARDENING WORKOUT (taken from the S.A. Herb Society Newsletter, March '00)

Did you know that 45 minutes of gardening burns as many calories as 30 minutes of aerobics? And, like aerobics, it will lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and help to prevent diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis. Article from "The New Garden Workout" by Dan Hickey

(www.house.net.com)

Research shows that even short bursts of moderate activity throughout the day has some health benefits, as long as each "burst" lasts at least 8 minutes, and the total for the day is 30 minutes. But, says Dr. William Haskell of Stanford University Center for Research in Disease Prevention, "These activities need to be of at least moderate intensity. A person has to do more than putter around a flower bed." His advice is to combine gardening with regular aerobic exercise. Still, gardening is a great way to lose or maintain weight. And many studies show that the more you enjoy the exercise activity, the more likely you are to stick with it. Jeff Restuccio, author of *Fitness the Dynamic Gardening Way* (Balance of Nature Pub., 1992), advises that you turn garden work into garden exercise. He recommends such techniques as bending your knees while raking, or placing a crate that requires you to step up and down as you move from one bed to another. Simply being aware of this duration and intensity of your gardening can turn the activity into a beneficial one. Here are some additional ideas offered by Hickey: 1) As with any exercise, take time to stretch and avoid marathon sessions. 2) Plan a daily gardening activity, even if it's just parking your car a mile away and walking to the nursery to buy your seeds. 3) Vary your activities. Break up strenuous chores with easier and more enjoyable ones. 4) Count the minutes. Be sure your daily gardening is at least 30 minutes total. If you've been inactive for a while, build up to it. 5) Dig holes. Digging and shoveling are big calorie burners. 6) Make a compost heap. Turning compost is another good calorie burner. 7) Listen to your muscles. Increase range of motion or add weight or resistance to a garden activity if you feel you safely can. 8) Above all, don't forget why you garden!

Preventive Maintenance for the House:

See notes in "Oct 2 do" list.

In Our Rose Garden: "Fossils indicate roses have been around more than 40 million years- longer than humans." (- BB) Hopefully the weather will cooperate so pruning the large roses will be completed by the end of the first week and the miniatures can be finished by the second week. Only the once-a-year blooming OGR's are to be shaped and pruned after they bloom. Selecting and planting new roses should be done as early as possible. The best bushes (strongest) go to the early buyers and those bushes that are planted quickly have the best chance of surviving. Establishing a good root system before the plant leafs out, and avoiding all chemical fertilizers for the first month ensures the plant won't dehydrate when the warm temperatures arrive.

MILDEW develops when warm days and cool nights have been present for 3 to 4 days. BLACK SPOT comes out of it's dormancy when warm days, warm nights, and lots of moisture is present.

Therefore, our first fungal attack in the Spring will be from powdery mildew followed a month or two later by black spot. Both can be prevented by pre-spraying bushes when they are cut back and before much foliage is established, with something like *Daconil* or *Triforine* (formerly *Funginex*).

Daconil may do a better job when outside temperatures are no higher than the 80's. (Neem oil:

"Rose Defense", and others can be used if temperatures don't get up above 90). *Maneb* or *Manzate* are very inexpensive but sure preventive controls for black spot alone. *Compass* carries a hefty beginning price, but per application, it is price-effective and is effective both fungal diseases. *It is not necessary to spray for insects until they appear.* APHIDS are the chief insect pests at this time and they can be controlled with almost any good insecticide (sprayed just on the new foliage where the insects are feeding). If established roses were not fertilized in late Feb., they should be fed at once. One WEED pulled now prevents umpteen in April. If we have very many weeds, we may not be using enough mulch. Be sure to water before and after spraying and feeding.

A YEAR IN THE ROSE GARDEN: by A.J."Fop" Warner

Thoroughly spray for fungus diseases while the bushes are cut back and before much foliage is established. It is essential to prevent the start of blackspot rather than to cure it. Don't miss a week from now on.

Continue touch-up pruning. There will be a few canes that, for one reason or another, simply do not sprout and grow properly. Perhaps there was winter damage or disease we overlooked in Feb. It is best to take them out now, back to the source to encourage new basal shoots.

Finger prune regularly.

Some rosarian's advise taking off the old mulch and composting it, on the theory that diseases lurk in it. Leave it alone and add to it. This writer has followed this practice for the last 15 years with no disease buildup.

Add to mulch before new basal breaks show up, to lessen the chance of damage to the tender growth during application.

It is not necessary or even desirable to remove old mulch or scratch the fertilizer into the soil. Except for fish and blood meal, simple scatter the fertilizer on the mulch like feeding the chickens and let nature take its course. A good rain or heavy watering will get the fertilizer where it belongs.

Watch for basal breaks (vigorous shoots coming from, or within 5 inches above the bud union). Some pinch them when they get 1 or 2 feet high; others let them go ahead and flower first. In either case, tie them off to a stake or another cane. They are very fragile at this time and if the wind or the neighbor's dog breaks them off, it may be a long time before you get another.

Keep some buckets, bags or pine straw around to protect new base shoots from the late frosts. Providing it does not freeze, only a light cover or shelter will prevent frost damage. (Note: Contrary to folklore, washing down a frost-covered plant will only make the damage worse.)

Newly planted bushes that bloom later this month will do better if the first blooms are removed. Snap them off at the peduncle and use them by floating in a bowl and leaving the foliage on the bush.

Organic Rose Program - HG (see Feb2do List for complete program)

Watering: If possible, save and use rainwater. If not, add 1 tbsp. of natural apple cider vinegar per gallon of water. If all else fails, just use tap water but don't over water. Avoid salty well water.

For best results foliar feed with *Garrett Juice* every 2 weeks, but as least once a month.

When soil is healthy, nothing but *Garrett Juice* is needed in the spray.

PEST CONTROL PROGRAM: Add the following to *Garrett Juice* (visit his web site to get his recipe or pick it up at a local nursery) and spray as needed.

Garlic tea or mild vinegar- 1/4cup/gal. or label directions for minor insect or disease infestations.

Potassium bicarbonate - 1 rounded tbsp. /gal. for minor diseases.

Liquid biostimulants - Use per label - Medina Soil Activator, or similar product.

Neem or plant oil products - Use per label directions for more serious insect and disease infestations.

For THRIPS, apply beneficial nematodes to the soil in early spring.

Fish emulsion - 2oz. /gal. for additional nutrients (may not be needed when using compost tea)

SPRAY SCHEDULE: 1st spraying at pink bud in the spring. 1st two sprayings should include *Garrett Juice* and garlic tea (additional sprayings as necessary). For best results spray every two weeks, but at least once a month. When soil is healthy, nothing but *Garrett Juice* is needed.

In Our Herb Garden: Mar. 15 is the average last frost date for our Zone 8 (b). * Thin annual seedlings planted in February. *Plant transplants of annual or perennial herbs and label cultivars for identification. Examples to plant are parsley, French thyme (which does better in S.A.'s hot months than English thyme), oreganos, and Mexican mint marigold. * Plant basil seed, which needs warm soil (day/night temps, above 60 degs.). * Plant ginger roots shallow in area where they will receive afternoon shade. For edible ginger, purchase firm roots from the produce section of your local grocery store. - *HERBS: A Resource Guide for San Antonio*

Amazing Antidote for TOMATO BLOSSOM ROT: "Rot Go Tonic", mix 1tsp. of gypsum, 1tsp. of Epsom salts, and 1 heaping shovelful of compost in a bucket. Add a trowelful to each hole when you plant tomato seedlings, and say good-bye to rot!

ROSE APHID Antidote: Take 1 orange peel, coarsely chopped, 1tbsp. of baby shampoo, and 2 cups of water then put in a blender and blend on high for 10 -15 seconds. Strain out the pulp into a coffee filter, then pour the liquid into a handheld mist sprayer. Get out your hose and blast your roses with a high-pressure spray nozzle to dislodge the aphids. Then mist spray the plants... and it's adios aphids.

Dying Roses! "BLACK SPOT Remover Tonic." You'll need 15 tomato leaves, 2 small onions, and 1/4 cup of rubbing alcohol. Chop the tomato leaves and onions into finely minced pieces, and steep them in the alcohol overnight. Paint the brew on both the tops and bottoms of any infected rose leaves (and at least others around them).

POWDERY MILDEW Control Tonic: Mix 4 tbsp. of baking soda, 2 tbsp. of Murphy's Oil Soap, and 1 gallon of warm water and pour into a handheld mist sprayer. Apply liberally when you see telltale white spots.

Timely Tree Tonic: Mix 1 cup of beer, 4-1/2 Tbsp. of instant tea, 1Tbsp. of gelatin, 1Tbsp. of baby shampoo, 1Tbsp. of ammonia, 1Tbsp. of whiskey, and 1Tbsp. of hydrogen peroxide in 2 gallons of warm water. Give each tree up to a quart of this terrific treat each month throughout the summer.

MILDEW on Annuals! Mildew can make a mess out of your annuals. Try my "Baking Soda Spray". Mix 2Tbsp. of baby shampoo, and 1Tbsp. of baking soda in 1 gallon of warm water and mist spray your plants lightly once a week.

YELLOWING Rhododendrons! "Fantastic Flowering Shrub Tonic." Mix 1tbsp. of baby shampoo, 1Tbsp. of hydrated lime (or bone meal), and 1Tbsp. of Liquid Iron in one gallon of water. Then pour the elixir on your flowering shrubs.

To protect your perennial seedlings from transplant shock, feed 'em: 1Tbsp. of fish

fertilizer; 1Tbsp. of ammonia; 1Tbsp. of Murphy's Oil Soap; 1tsp. of instant tea granules; 1qt. of warm water. Mix all of the ingredients together, pour into a handheld, mist sprayer bottle, and mist the seedlings several times a day.

Horsetail Anti-Disease Spray: Using 1/8cup dried horsetail stems; 1gal. water. Add the leaves and water to a large pot. Bring it to a boil, then let simmer for at least 30 minutes. Let cool, then strain out the stems. To use, mix 1 part of the concentrate with 10 parts water, and spray on disease-prone plants like bee balm and garden phlox. - JB

2nd WEEK:

Feed deciduous trees and shrubs as they resume growth.

The live oak leaves may be falling, this is normal, no cause for alarm. The round growths on the leaves are wasp galls, harmless to the tree. Use them for mulch.

Paint all wounds on oak trees with pruning paint or latex paint immediately after the wound is made or discovered in order to prevent the spread of oak wilt.

Watch for SOPHORA CATERPILLARS on Texas mountain laurel. Use Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) or Malathion to control them.

Geraniums, dianthus and petunias (salvia plants can be set out too - EO) are good color plants for the sun during this transition from cool weather to hot.

Cut off any fruits set on Daffodils, Irises and other bulbs (and fertilize if not already done so).

It is not too late to apply dormant oil to pecans trees that had PHYLLOXERA last year.

Prune crape myrtles in mid to late March for shaping. Do not cut their tops off.

The current crop of WEEDS in your lawn will die with warm weather. Keep them mowed to prevent reseeding. (*Mowing your lawn now will reduce weeds from reseeding and encourage turf grass to grow and green up sooner. - TAE)

If dandelions were hard to grow, they'd be welcome in any lawn. - BB

BALL MOSS does not harm oak trees, but you can apply cupric hydroxide (Kocide) to control it.

Side-dress onions with 1 cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer or 2 cups of organic fertilizer per 10 feet of row. - CF

Sow sweet corn, snap and lima beans and cucumber seeds. Plant watermelons, squash, seed potatoes, carrots and all types of beans.

Finish pruning evergreen shrubs. Wait on spring-flowering shrubs.

Apply slow-release fertilizers to landscape plants (not lawns) to gear up for the growing season. - EO

Oak pollen season is upon us and it's another trouble maker. - me

Spring Cleaning - Spring is in the air (well, just around the corner), and so are those unwanted dust bunnies and other allergens in your home. Keep your abode springtime fresh with these decluttering tips from the Soap and Detergent Association.

- * Allow enough time to get organized. Give yourself 3 to 6 hrs. per closet or 1 ½ days per room.
- * Set aside 10 to 15 mins. each day to sort mail and take action on necessary items. Better yet, sort mail over a trash can or recycle bin, eliminating as much as possible.
- * Toss out old paperwork, such as expired coupons, old warranties and service contracts, outdated schedules, invalid insurance policies, old grocery receipts, recipes and clippings you haven't used in the last 5 years. Remove and file special magazine and newspaper articles. Then, toss newspapers older than a week and magazines older than 3 months.
- * Keep a limited supply of bags, containers and jars. That means 6 to 12 plastic containers and

glass jars, about 12 paper bags and 24 plastic bags. Let the rest go.

* Buy each family member a "treasure chest" for memorabilia - a large plastic tub that fits under a bed or on the closet floor. They can add or delete items, and let the container size limit how much they keep. - *RAG*

Early blight is a fungal disease that attacks tomatoes and several related crops. In the spring, the fungal spores that cause the disease are spread by the wind. The disease is characterized by dark spots that appear on older leaves that later appear on younger leaves and stems. One way to avoid this disease is to wrap your plants with fiber row cover during the early spring when the spores are most likely to be spread. Be sure to remove the protection when the plants start to bloom because tomatoes are wind pollinated.

Gardening tips - How you ever pre-sprouted your potatoes? This technique will give you a jump on the growing season. It is kind of like starting your vegetable seedlings inside. Just place your seed potatoes in a warm (70 degree or so) spot with a little indirect light about two weeks before you intend to plant them. When the sprouts are about 1/2-inch long, it is time to cut the potatoes into seed pieces, dip in sulfur and plant.

If you suspect a late frost is on the way and you want to protect your small tomato transplants, try this. Fill a gallon size plastic milk jug with water and place it on the north side of the plants, as close to the plant as possible. During the day, the water will absorb heat and then during the night it will release the heat to provide several degrees of frost protection. - *TGS*

3rd Week

We have passed the average fast frost date for San Antonio. (It can still freeze! The time of the latest freeze is still two weeks away.) If extended weather-forecasts are favorable, it should be ok to turn the gas off to your furnace! - *me*

Spring is an exciting time for backyard bird watching as some of our familiar friends migrate home and join those who stayed all winter. Watch for beautiful *warblers* as they secretly journey through our yards during the first few weeks of May. Grab your binoculars, and you may catch a glimpse of one flitting about tree branches or checking out your birdbath mister... Keep an eye out for nest-building and nestling-feeding behaviors as *bluebirds, wrens, chickadees and woodpeckers* take to the nest and raise their young. - *WBU*

Put bird feeders and birdbaths near protective cover, such as trees and shrubs.

After cleaning your birdhouses, put a few sticks in the wren houses. These birds are more likely to nest in houses they've already used. - *BB*

APHIDS are feasting on cole crops and other plants (and my roses). Try to wash them off with a blast of soapy water until the predator insects get them in control, or you can spray with *Organo-spray* or *Malathion*.

Oust APHIDS! Consider adding nasturtiums (aphid's favorite snack!) to your flower bed. When the nasturtiums get attacked, just yank them out and destroy them, leaving your other plants in fine shape. - (*ROGB*)

Revitalize leggy salvia, pomegranate, crape myrtle, vitex, ceniza and other shrubs by removing the old stem at ground level. Leave three to eight young stems.

Begonias can be set out in the landscape. Bronze-leafed, pink-flowered begonias will do well in full sun.

Pansies, stocks, calendulas and other cool-weather blooms decline quickly if they dry out. Keep them well-watered.

Let potting medium of geraniums dry between waterings.

Replenish the mulch of young trees. Place it in a donut shape so the mulch is over the roots but not against the trunk(at least 3 inches away). - *CF*

Plant warm-season annuals and vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, petunias and Dahlberg daisies, but protect the plants if frost (or hail storm) is predicted.

Sow bush lima beans, pole lima beans, cantaloupe and watermelon seeds. - *EO*

If weather is looking good, this is a good time for planting cantaloupes, watermelons and cucumbers. - *TAE*

Apply broadleaf weed killer to eliminate CLOVER, DANDELIONS, HENBIT and other weeds from turf.

Remove freeze-damaged vegetables from your garden to prevent disease. - *LR*

Lightning to the north or west usually means a thunderstorm is coming toward you but lightning to the south or east indicates the lightning has passed. This is a good rule of thumb but we still recommend staying out of trees anytime you see lightning or hear thunder, regardless of the direction. - *TGS*

Springtime Stroll - Spring moves north at a rate of about 16 miles a day. That means a person walking at a good pace could keep up with it, watching dogwoods, tulips and daffodils (and roses) come into bloom along the way. - *BB*

Depending on weather & sightings, it's time to clean & set out hummingbird feeders! (First hummer visit 3/29!) - *me*

Ruby-throated hummingbirds will attack creatures of any size that are a threat to their nests or food source. - *BB*

4th Week:

Goldfinches are changing to their breeding plumage now. Keep providing thistle and sunflower seeds for another month before they head north.

Consider geraniums for a splash of color on the patio or balcony. They can handle full sun until temperatures increase. Then move them to a location with less sun.

Cold-sensitive plants can be placed on the patio now (check weather forecast). Be prepared to protect them if a late freeze threatens.

It's not too late to prune crape myrtles. Do not top the trees but, remove dead wood and excess stems (leave 3 to 6 per cane). Cut back limbs, but try not to leave stubby branches.

Thin peaches and plums to one fruit every 6 inches when they reach dime size.

The first set of potted tomatoes can be placed in the garden now. Place *Gro-Web* on the cages for protection from wind and cool nights.

Wait to fertilize your lawn until you have mowed real grass twice. Fertilizing too early only benefits the weeds.

Plant plugs of "Del Mar" St. Augustine in semi-shade areas where your lawn is thin. Do not over-water! Aerate the lawn to reduce soil compaction and disease pressures.

Add more mulch around hardy perennials, shrubs, and trees if it is now less than four inches deep. Keep mulch away from base of tree trunk.

Peak wildflower time in the San Antonio area probably will be during the first week of April. -*CF*

Begin a fruit-tree spray program, alternating fungicide and insecticide, after fruit blossoms fall. - *EO*

For an effective butterfly garden, select nectar flowers that bloom at different times. - *BB*

Ground temperature is warming up, and hot-season crops can be sown. Consider planting

Southern peas, pumpkins, peanuts, squash and okra. - *TAE*

Mow or prune overgrown Asiatic jasmine.

Begin a fruit tree spray program after petals fall. Alternate fungicide and insecticide. - LR

* In updating this collection of useful tips, I have come across several comments, instructions and chemicals that are being replaced with newer techniques and materials. In some cases, I do not want to change what others have written, but I need to bring "them" up-to-date by putting a "(?)" right behind the point in question and maybe adding my own two-cents worth. - me

Many thanks to my contributors for sharing their wisdom so I can learn and share it with you.

PMA - Purple Martin Association; visit their web site @ www.purplemartin.org.

SB - Steve Brown, meteorologist with KSAT; visit their web site @ www.ksat.com.

CF - Calvin Finch, (former) Bexar Co. extension agent for horticulture, Texas Agricultural Extension Service (courtesy S.A. Express-News)

EO - Edna Ortiz, (former) Bexar Co. extension agent for horticulture, Texas Agricultural Extension Service (courtesy S.A. Express-News)

AJW - A.J. "Pop" Warner, Consulting Rosarian, writer of the book "A Year in the Rose"

TAE - Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Bexar County (courtesy S.A. Express-News)

LR - Lynn Rawe, (former) Bexar Co. extension agent for horticulture, Texas Cooperative Extension Service (courtesy S.A. Express-News); visit their web site @ www.bexar-tx.tamu.edu.

HG - John Howard Garrett, aka the "Dirt Doctor"; visit his web site @ www.dirtdoctor.com.

NS - Neil Sperry, Texas horticulturalists, Publisher "Neil Sperry's GARDENS" and contributor to S.A. Express-News. Visit his web site @ www.neilsperry.com.

ROGB - Rodale Organic Gardening Books

WBC - Wild Bird Center

BB - Birds & Blooms mag.

JB - Jerry Baker, America's Master Gardener, aka "The Yardener".

RAG - Rene A. Guzman, (information compiled) courtesy S.A. Express-News

TGS - Texas Gardener Seeds. E-newsletter from Texas Gardener Magazine; visit their web-site @ www.texasgardener.com.