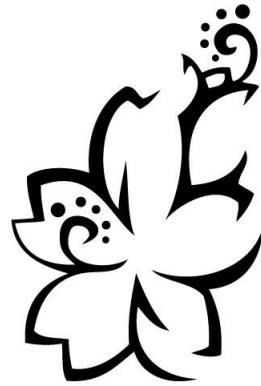


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March Gardening Tips

Among gardening jobs, fertilizing plants is by far the most important garden chore this month. March is also one of the best times to plant ground covers and perennials and most trees, shrubs and vines. Be certain to group plants according to their water needs, their sun/shade requirements and soil type needs.

March is the last month before autumn to plant cool-season flowers and vegetables. Later this month we can start planting some of the warm-season plants. Right on target for our late winter this year!

Plant Veggies: 20% Off now! You can still plant some cool-season vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce, cabbage, and kale but start planting warm-season vegetables such as beans, summer and winter squashes and early tomato varieties. No need to wait until April to put in heat-lovers such as tomatoes varieties, peppers, melons, eggplant, and okra - we have plenty of warm days ahead of us to get a jump start on these fruits & veggies. And, of course you can plant year-round crops such carrots, beets, swiss chard, and radishes.

For an attractive array of lettuce flavors, textures and colors, choose varieties from as many as you can find - dark greens, light greens, reds, bronzes; butterhead, loose leaf, romaine, and crisp head. Replant every three weeks for continuous harvests of young sweet succulent leaves and heads. Choose varieties that are heat-resistant, bolt-resistant, and less likely to turn bitter when they mature during hot weather.



Plant your Herb Garden: Herbs to start from seed include anise, basil, chervil, chives, cilantro (coriander), dill, fennel, lavender, marjoram, oregano, parsley, and savory; transplant mint, rosemary, sage, tarragon, and thyme. Herbs make great landscaping plants as well. Chives add attractive spear-like foliage among blooming plants. Rosemary and woolly thyme make attractive drought-tolerant trouble-free ground covers.

Plant Geraniums: Geraniums provide brilliant cheer whether grown in flower beds, containers or hanging baskets. They are easy to grow from bedding plants, seeds or cuttings and they are vigorous and trouble-free. Keep in mind that geraniums need a sunny location and a well-draining soil enriched with organic matter.

Once established, geraniums are fairly drought-resistant although they need regular water to produce their best floral display- but too much watering should be avoided. Let the soil dry between watering and avoid overhead irrigation because this promotes disease. Scented geraniums offer a variety of garden fragrances and delicately-shaped foliage. Scents include almond, apple, apricot, coconut, lemon, lime, nutmeg, peppermint, and rose. Shapes and textured foliage vary from plain green round leaves to those lacy, rippled, variegated ones.

Plant Perennials: Blooming perennials to plant now include campanula, columbine, coral bells, delphinium, geranium, kangaroo paw, lavender, limonium, penstemon, salvia. If you live away from the coast, wait to plant bougainvillea until later this month (or in April) after all threat of frost is past.

Plant Spring Annuals: Flowering annuals include alyssum, cosmos, gazania, geranium, helichrysum, marigold, morning glory, petunias, phlox, portulaca, thunbergia, verbena, vinca, and zinnia. Shrubs include Australian fuchsias, ceanothus, coffee berries, cotoneasters, pineapple guava, manzanita, rockroses and verbenas (an especially good ground cover).

Continue to Think Water Conservation: If you haven't yet, consider landscaping with plants that thrive under conditions of drought, neglect and hot summers – even if not this year but in future years. Many beautiful flowering shrubs are naturally drought resistant and can help birds and small animals survive next winter by providing food and habitat. Perennials with great tolerance for drought include achillea, anaphalis, artemisia, asclepias, coreopsis, daylily, dianthus, echinopsis, eryngium, gaillardia, lavandula, potentilla, salvia, santolina, sedum sempervivum, stachys, thyme and veronica.

Garden Maintenance

Fertilize Most Plants: The most important garden job during March is to feed your plants. Plants make the transition from winter to spring this month and they need an application of fertilizer. Give all your hard-working permanent plants a boost with a little granulated fertilizer high in nitrogen. Annual and perennial flowers, container plants, houseplants, and citrus and avocado trees will welcome food now. Wait until after bloom to feed camellias and azaleas then give them an acid-type fertilizer.

Always water very thoroughly after feeding. Best practice is to fertilize before it rains so the nitrogen-rich water will soak into your plants' root system. Any nitrogen that is leached out of the soil because of the rain will welcome a good drenching of water with far less sodium.

Thin Fruit Trees: Begin thinning apples, pears, and stone fruits when they are about 1/2 inch in size. Space them 4 to 6 inches apart or leave one fruit per spur.



Control Aphids: New growth attracts these sucking pests. Dislodge with a strong blast of water from a hose or strip from plants by hand. (Wear thin disposable rubber gloves if you're squeamish).

Beware of **Snails!!** Look for them hiding under strap-leaved plants like agapanthus, phormium, and daylilies during daylight hours. Vegetables or annuals in raised beds can be protected the same way. An effective and safe option is "Sluggo" - a commercial bait that is both pet and wildlife safe. Unlike most snail baits, Sluggo is iron phosphate based, which is actually a plant nutrient.

Tomato Basics: Tomato labels bearing any combination of V, F, N, or T indicate resistance to certain diseases and pests. Verticillium (V) and fusarium (F) are fungi that wilt and stunt or kill the plant, usually in hot weather. Nematodes (N) are microscopic worms that feed on roots (look for swollen root nodules) and stunt growth. Tobacco mosaic (T) is a virus that mottles leaves, stunts plants, and reduces yields.

Citrus Trees: If you live inland you can now start to fertilize your citrus. If you live near the coast (or any frost-free area) continue fertilizing your citrus. Mature citrus trees need about one pound of "actual" nitrogen per year. Split the fertilizer into equal portions and apply once a month (or every other month) until June. Apple, apricot, peach, and plum trees routinely set more fruit than the tree can ripen. Twist off extra fruit when they reach about marble-size. Leave two of the largest and healthiest young fruits on each 12 inches of stem.

Perennials: If perennials such as agapanthus, asters, bellflowers, callas, cymbidiums, daylilies, rudbeckia, Shasta daisies, penstemon and yarrow are crowded and last year's blooms were sparse it's time to divide them. Dig up each clump so that the root ball comes up intact. Wash or gently shake off excess soil then cut into divisions with a sharp knife. Each division should have plenty of roots and a few leaves. Replant immediately.

Hydrangeas: Now is the time for using Hydrangea Blue to turn your flowers blue/purple. Apply now and every 4 to 6 weeks.

Gardenias are greedy feeders. When the leaves turn a pale green or a pale yellow it signals a lack of iron, a lack of nitrogen - or both. Feed with a fertilizer designed for gardenias that contains chelated iron.

Cut Back Fuchsias: Trim trailing varieties to the edge of their containers. Cut upright types back by two-thirds so that only two or three nodes (buds or leaf scars) remain on the stems then feed to spur new growth. Fuchsias flower on new wood so prune either severely for compact growth or lightly for a more draping appearance. Continue to pinch and groom fuchsias regularly throughout the season to direct new growth and encourage more blooming.

Prune Azaleas and Camellias after the last flower has wilted but before new foliage growth has begun- this is when the buds for next year's blooms set. Pruning this new growth will remove next year's color. The proper timing for pruning can be as early as February or as late as June depending on the variety and the weather. Feed plants with cottonseed meal and renew their acid mulch. Keep their roots evenly moist but not soggy throughout the growing season.

Roses: Water deeply so they can grow plenty of leaves, stalks and buds for next month's flowering. Fertilize now and every 6 weeks, unless you are using a healthy organic soil full of rich nutrients- then reduce your fertilizing schedule to every 8 weeks. If you want to "grow for show" or for one large flower per stem just disbud your hybrid tea and grandiflora roses early this month. This means remove the secondary or side buds on the flower stem shortly after they appear. Do not disbud roses that are naturally meant to grow in bunches-e.g. floribundas and polyanthus.

Teach your plants to grow deeply for moisture. In spring (for average soils) water deeply only every two to three weeks. By the time that summer's heat arrives plant feeder roots will be growing deeply for moisture and the plants won't need watering more frequently than once a week during very hot spells. One inch of irrigated water will soak down to different depths depending on how heavy your soil is: 12 inches deep in sandy soil, nine inches deep in loamy soil but only three inches deep in clay soil. Plant root zones generally reach from 2 to 12 inches.

