

March 2011



GardenWise

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Gardening in March

Lawn Care

- ▶ Get ready for regular mowing. Your lawn will grow more rapidly in the spring. Make sure your mower blades are sharp.
- ▶ Rake up small bare spots to expose the soil for reseeding. The new patching combinations work well for small areas in need of renovation.

Edibles

- ▶ Now is a good time to start planting or thinking about planting those cool season vegetables. Some veggies you can now add to your garden are cauliflower, cabbage, beets, kale, leaf lettuce, head lettuce, onions, carrots, mustard, garden peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips.
- ▶ Dig or till the vegetable plots, if not done already. Use well decomposed garden compost for an amendment and use about 2 inches.
- ▶ Weed strawberry patches carefully; remember that they have shallow roots.
- ▶ Bare-root fruit trees are being planted this month. It is a good idea to soak the roots in water over night when they arrive and before planting.
- ▶ Prune raspberry and blackberry canes now if you have not already done so. Cut out dead or weak canes and prune off all disease canes. Remember to cut the side branches back on blackberries

to at least one foot for larger more abundant fruit.

- ▶ Rake up leaves and husks from walnut and pecan trees to prevent fungal disease and insect populations from increasing.
- ▶ Prune dormant deciduous fruit trees such as apples before the buds swell too much.

Ornamental Plants and General Care

- ▶ Get rid of weeds and debris from your rock garden as soon as weather permits. Add soil in the areas that the winter rains have washed away.
- ▶ Speed up decomposition in your compost pile by turning it with a pitchfork every couple weeks now that temperatures are warming up and we are getting outside more.
- ▶ Dig in compost, manure and other amendments in planting areas when the soil is dry enough.
- ▶ Make sure your trees and shrubs have no broken branches after the harsh winter weather.
- ▶ Keep an eye out for aphids that like the new spring growth and use control if needed.
- ▶ Start hoeing or pulling weeds now to avoid a rush later when the weather warms up. Pulling weeds is much easier while the ground is wet.

Edging a Bed

The first thing an experienced gardener does when it is time to spruce up the landscape for visitors is edging the flowerbed. The reason for this is that if you have only time to do a few things, edging will make the garden have a crisp finished look. Turf grass doesn't stay put as many of us find out over time and of course you can lessen this problem by adding permanent edging and a possible mowing strip. Edging twice a year usually is enough to keep that turf in tack. Of course if you are edging more than this consider a permanent edging. It is not overwhelming if you undertake the task methodically. Use the following steps to get the best results.

Step 1 – Mark where you want to cut. Use a rubber hose (or landscaping paint) to indicate exactly where you want the edge of the flowerbed to be. Don't make the edge too close to damage the roots of the plants or too far away to make a gap of bare soil.

Step 2 – Use a sharp spade. I use a landscaper's shovel, square on the end, and sharp. Starting at one edge of the bed, angle the spade back slightly and cut into the grass on the inside edge of the hose or line painted to a depth of about 4 inches (mark on your shovel). This forms a gap the roots don't cross easily. Move down the bed repeating the process till the line is finished.

Step 3 – Remove the sod and shake out the soil. Put away the hose. Pull up the manageable pieces of the cut sod and shake out the soil either onto the bed or into a wheelbarrow. You can whack two pieces of sod together to remove the soil. Add the soil back to the bed and put the sod into the compost bin and you are done.



Preventing Weeds in the Garden

We all seem to spend a lot of time weeding in our gardens. The best idea is to keep the weeds out of our gardens in the first place. You can't stop the birds from spreading the seeds but you can limit the amount of weeds brought into your garden and stop them from getting out of control. Listed below are some tips for limiting the weeds in your garden.

1. **Patrol the borders of your garden:** Inspect all new plants for hitchhiking weeds. The longer a plant sits in a pot at the nursery the more likely a weed seed will germinate in the pot. Make sure you remove the weeds from all the pots preferably in the nursery before you take it home.
2. **Cover ups:** Mulches are still one of the best ways to keep weeds from taking over your garden. Mulches whether organic or synthetic will smother weed seeds.
3. **Don't disturb the soil:** Keep cultivation to a minimum in your garden. There are always weed seeds in the soil, but many will not germinate unless they are exposed to sunlight. While some scratching and cultivating of the soil around plants is good to keep the soil from compacting, frequent cultivating just leads to more weeds. You are better off applying an organic mulch.
4. **To Till or Not to Till:** For years tilling has been recommended for clearing a new garden bed. Tilling is a quick way to break up the soil and incorporate some green material or amendments. You are still turning up weed seeds that will sprout. Keep tilling to a minimum.

Keeping Cats Out of the Garden

Some people love cats, others do not. Whatever your feelings are about cats, most people probably don't want our furry friends to dig up our garden. So what do you do? First, it helps if you try and think like a cat when the cat visits the garden. With the exception of a few plants like catnip most cats aren't really out to destroy the garden. They may try to eat some of the tasty plants but most think the outdoors is their private litter box and a nice patch of dirt is their personal invitation. It also makes a great place to play and roll around.

One way to keep your cats from roaming into the neighbor's garden is to make your garden space more attractive to them. You can plant a cat friendly garden space in your landscape to satisfy their needs or do some items in your existing garden like planting a patch of catnip. Spread some sand for a cool sleeping place or a place to dig. If

your cat prefers to keep you company while you are in the garden, then leave a cat sized play area in one part of your garden. Make sure you plant or mulch the rest of the garden so your cats have no other good place to roll and will stay in their designated area.



If you don't want your neighbor's cats in your garden, try a drastic measure like spraying the intruder with a blast from the water hose or keep a stream spray bottle nearby to get the intruder. Most cats will turn and run. Most cats do not like rue so add it to your garden for the cat who likes water. The blue foliage may not match your theme at the location but most cats do not like the odor of rue. A wide berth in the area where they most likely enter is a strategy as well as adding thorny bushes like roses.

Some gardeners use homemade remedies to deter cats. I cannot personally attest to the success of any of these methods, but it wouldn't hurt to try them I guess.

Some of the remedies include sprinkling the plants with crushed pepper, adding pepper plants in strategic areas or even making a tea made with rue or ground up grape fruit and lemon rind and spraying it on the plants you want to protect. Or try to get rid of unwanted cat visitors with devices that use sound, light or water to scare them away. Door mats with soft points aren't a favorite of cats so can add a mat here or there to deter them. Trying multiple methods to break the cats from upsetting the garden may be a long term quest! Remember that cats are not stupid creatures. They can be taught. Sometimes a stern "no" is all it takes to teach a cat to stay out of the garden or a certain garden area.



4-H Plant Sale

The Forsyth County 4-H Plant Sale is the annual fund raising event for our 4-H Program. These funds go to support our youth through scholarships, supplies and program needs. This year's sale includes blueberries, raspberries, grapes, strawberries, asparagus, herbs and much more. To get more information on the plants available as well as an order form go to <http://forsyth.cc/CES/4-H/> or call (336) 703-2850. All orders must be received by March 11th.



UPCOMING FREE GARDEN PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

- ▶ March 1, 6:00pm—**Beginning Vegetable Gardening** at Historic Bethabara Park
- ▶ March 1, 7:00pm—**Grafting Demonstration** at Lewisville Branch Library
- ▶ March 2, 11:00am—**Cottage Gardens at Reynolda** at Tanglewood Arboretum Office
- ▶ March 7, 7:00pm—**Reducing Your Debt Load** at Kernersville Branch Library
- ▶ March 8, 7:00pm—**Organic Gardening 201** at Rural Hall Branch Library
- ▶ March 9, 2:30pm—**Reducing Your Debt Load** at Walkertown Branch Library
- ▶ March 12, 10:00am—**Square Foot Gardening** at Southside Branch Library
- ▶ March 14, 6:00pm—**Growing Blueberries in the Home Landscape** at Clemmons Branch Library
- ▶ March 15, 7:00pm—**Easy Care Annuals and Perennials** at Lewisville Branch Library
- ▶ March 22, 7:00pm—**Four Season Vegetable Gardening** at Central Library
- ▶ March 24, 2:00pm—**Vegetable Gardening 101** at Reynolda Manor Branch Library



Registration is required. Please call Kathy Hepler at 703-2852 to register.

Please contact the Forsyth County Center @ 336-703-2850 if you would like to be on the GardenWise mailing list.

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