

This Month in the Garden ...

by Peggy Koppmann

It's March! There's hope in this month's calendar. Hope for sunshine, warming temperatures, a hint of green and growing things, and the official start of Spring. Pour your beverage of choice at 10:45 am on March 20 and toast the beginning of the season. In the words of Robin Williams, "Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!'"

Deterring Deer Damage It's been a terrible winter for deer damage in gardens and woodlands. Short of fencing options, gardeners are limited in the strategies they can use and with varying degrees of success. The traditional advice of planting aromatic plants and those that have latex sap, prickles, thorns, or fuzzy foliage, goes just so far as deer will nibble on most anything, sampling our yards and gardens like one gigantic buffet line. Some native plants may be more deer resistant, but nothing is deer proof. Dig deeper into this topic as a gardener and as a Master Gardener who gets asked this question a million times. Here's a place to start: <https://awaytogarden.com/deer-resistant-plants-resource-lists-gardeners/>. Also take a look at the excellent database of deer resistant plants from Rutgers University: <https://extension.rutgers.edu/deer-resistant-plants>.

Cold Crops You don't have to wait for the last frost date to start vegetable gardening. You can begin sowing cold tolerant crops when soil temperatures are around 40°F (4°C). Many crops can germinate in the early season chill but, as with most gardening decisions, Mother Nature has the last word. Put these on your list for early sowing: spinach, arugula, lettuce, peas, kale, radishes, potatoes, carrots, beets, sugar snap peas, and turnips. Plant at the recommended seed depth, generally twice as deep as the seed size. Take a look at White Hailstone radish or Kelvedon Wonder Garden Pea, a dwarf variety you can grow in a container and get your season off to an early start.

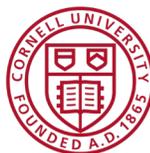
Leave Me Alone! We've written earlier about winter pruning before "bud break" of plants that bloom later in the season. At the same time, there are some plants that bloom on "old wood" and should NOT be pruned in the spring, including: azalea, rhododendron, quince, forsythia, and mock orange. Pruning them now means you will miss out on their spring flowering show; prune them AFTER they flower. Often listed in this category are clematis and hydrangeas. Now, things get complicated! Clematis fall into

three categories for pruning; see <https://www.thespruce.com/pruning-clematis-plants-1402781> for a good explanation of the rules. For hydrangeas, take a deep dive into the literature - unless you saved the label, you actually know the name, and can research pruning rules properly. Good luck!

Often Overlooked Early blooming shrubs can be the stars of your spring garden. Branch out, (get it??) and add some new selections this year. This can also be a good strategy for gardeners that are "downsizing" their garden, replacing perennial areas with shrubs to fill spaces and add structure to the garden. Take a look at Summersweet (Clethra alnifolia) or Mountain Laurel (Kalmia latifolia) for their delicate airy booms. Kerria (Kerria japonica) is a magnet for bees and butterflies with its bright yellow flowers, while Deutzia is compact and smothered in white or pink flowers. 'Czechmark Trilogy', a Weigela cultivar, is a heavy bloomer with white, pink, and red flowers all on one plant. For a truly magical bloom, look for Pearl Bush, (Exochorda). Masses of white blossoms on arching branches make this plant a showstopper.

Out of the Box Master Gardeners should expect lots of questions again this year about the infestation of box tree moths. Methods for dealing with the insects vary from 'rip out the plant', to hand-picking, to chemical treatment. We should be able to give an informed spectrum of strategies to those asking for advice, so do your homework and be prepared to give accurate, understandable information when asked. Here are some places to start: <https://cals.cornell.edu/integrated-pest-management/outreach-education/fact-sheets/box-tree-moth>; <https://extension.psu.edu/box-tree-moth>; <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-box-tree-moth-check-boxwoods.508.pdf>

And then... *Check plants for frost heave; clean birdhouses; start weeding; set out slug bait or crushed egg shells; start fertilizing house plants; plant seed potatoes; cut back perennial grasses; check the viability of last year's seeds; get a new garden journal and start recording notes; clean up evergreen groundcovers, hellebores, European ginger, and epimedium; find a vendor for REAL NYS maple syrup and treat yourself to a Welcome Spring Pancake Breakfast*



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