

March Outdoors and Gardening Presentations

by Teresa Gaffner

March is here and all over the Tri-Cities we see the early spring flowers of quince, daffodils, and forsythia blooming. Warmer weather is definitely on the way and it's finally time to head outdoors to start seeds for transplants and prepare our garden beds for spring plantings.

If you have not done a general clean up yet of your yard and garden beds, this is your last chance while the garden is still bare and what needs to be trimmed or removed is still easily seen. Remember the rule of the 4 D's- diseased, dying, damaged or dysfunctional plants, branches and stems can be removed at any time of the year. Now is also a good time to prune dormant trees and shrubs but leave the early spring bloomers such as azalea, hydrangeas and forsythia alone. These should only be pruned after they bloom. A link to a UT Extension pruning guide is available at the end of this article. Prepare your flower and vegetable beds by adding a soil amendment such as compost, manure, or worm castings. Be sure to mix it thoroughly before planting to ensure that it will surround and be available to the plant's root systems as they grow. Cool season vegetable crops like peas, spinach and beets can be sown straight into the garden now but be sure to protect them if the weather turns cold.

If you are interested in raised bed gardening, now is the time to do your research and gather the materials needed. Raised bed gardening is an efficient way to control soil quality, protect vegetables at all stages of growth and yield a bigger and better harvest. There is a link to a UT Extension publication on raised bed gardening included in this article.

Now is also the time to start your summer vegetables indoors, tomatoes, peppers, squash and many others can all be started inside from seed. The seedlings can be set outside in prepped beds or containers in April and May. Be sure to check the March links in the UT Extension Home Gardening Calendar for information on how to prepare and sustain your fruit and vegetable gardens. There are instructions in this month's calendar on growing seedlings and some great advice on growing tomatoes in Tennessee

Vegetables are not the only stars of the spring season. This is the time to plant fruit trees and shrubs. Buying small bare root trees is recommended as their growth and survival rates increase significantly when you start with smaller trees. As mentioned in previous posts, good planning and maintenance are the secrets to a successful fruit crop. Test your soil before planting so you can amend and fertilize it according to the results. You can find information about having your soil tested at <https://soillab.tennessee.edu>

Resources

UT Extension Growing Tomatoes

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/w346-h.pdf>

UT Extension Raised Bed Vegetable Gardening

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/SP291-N.pdf>

UT Extension Pruning Guide

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/pb1619.pdf>

UT Extension Planting Fruit Trees

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/SP307-B.pdf>

UT Extension Home Garden Calendar

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/w436.pdf>

Protect Seedlings from Spring Frosts

<https://newswire.caes.uga.edu/story/4043/protect-plants-from-frost.html>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.