

Garden Line - March 2010

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

So, March is here and Spring officially starts on March 20th. Many people will really get busy in their lawns and gardens this month, and the garden centers will become very popular (and crowded) venues. Also, many people feed birds during the winter; consider feeding them all year long. You'll appreciate their company in your garden, and they are good at controlling certain insects.



For those of you who may not have gotten your tomatoes planted in February, there is still time to do it now, but do it as soon as possible so you can get a crop before it gets too hot. Be sure to look for early-maturing varieties (such as 'Early Girl') or tomatoes that produce better once it gets warmer (such as many of the cherry or grape types).

March is also a good time to plant peppers, egg plants, squash, zucchini, and watermelons. They may grow slowly at first, as they prefer it a bit warmer, but I find it helpful to go ahead and get them growing so they can start getting their roots established. Once the warmer weather in late March and April gets here, they'll really take off and reward you with lots of delicious fruit this summer.



Consider adding some herbs and other beneficial insect attractors to your vegetable garden, as well as scattered about your landscape. Beneficial insects such as lady bugs, green lacewings, and assassin bugs will help you control problems insects such as aphids, leafhoppers, thrips, and spider mites (technically arachnids) the natural way. If you do get an outbreak of destructive insects, try simply blasting them off with a hose and water first. If that doesn't work you can try insecticidal soap that you either make yourself or purchase at the store. Here's a simple recipe for making your own:

- 1 water bottle with a spray trigger
- 1 tbs of dishwashing liquid
- 2 cups of water



I sometimes add a bit of rubbing alcohol to help desiccate soft-bodied insects. Be sure to spray both the surface and undersides of the leaves of infested plants. You may have to make a few repeated applications to completely control stubborn insects (why won't they just die?!).

March is a good month for installing soaker hoses or making sure your irrigation system is running smoothly before hot summer-time temperatures set in. Also, be sure to add a thick layer of weed-suppressing, moisture-retentive mulch. It will help reduce the amount of time you have to spend weeding and will help to lower your water bill, not to mention the fact that it helps to improve the soil as it breaks down.

This is also a great time to add annual color in pots, containers, and your flower beds. Plants to consider for this time of year include cockscomb (celosia), zinnia, portulaca, salvia, coleus, begonias, impatiens, and verbena, to name a few. Last year, I planted some 'Hot Lips' salvia and it attracted hummingbirds late into fall. Visit your local garden center today for a plethora of plants to spruce up your landscape!



And for those of us who haven't grubbed out all of our turf to make way for more gardening space, now is the appropriate time to fertilize, as the Bermuda and St. Augustine should be waking up by now. Consider getting a soil test done to see if you even need to fertilize. Be sure to fertilize at the recommended rate or even slightly lower. Over-fertilization results not only in overly lush lawns (resulting in rampant, disease-prone growth) but also in all that excess fertilizer being washed into the storm drains where it makes its way to the Gulf and contributes to a dead zone that occurs each year and kills thousands of fish. Be responsible when you fertilize. There are some great organic products out there that really minimize the chances of over-fertilizing and damage to the environment.

