

Garden Line - February 2011

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

February is a month of transition. We can still experience some very cold temperatures, yet have some warm days by the end of the month. Don't put away the frost cloth just yet, but get the shovels and trowels ready as planting season is almost here!



Finish any tidying up tasks you did not do in the garden last month. Any ratty looking perennials and ornamental grasses can be cut back now. The grasses are getting ready to put out a new flush of growth next month, so cutting them back now will allow this new growth to come out unimpeded. This is also an ideal time to mulch before things really start growing.

If you see an infestation of scale on any of your shrubs, now is a good time to smother them with an application of dormant oil. Be prepared to do a follow up spray in a week or two. Be sure not to apply dormant oil once temperatures are above 80 degrees, as injury can occur to your plants.

Success can still be had with some of the cool season crops that mature quickly, such as lettuce, radish, kohlrabi, mesclun mixes, spinach, cool season peas (such as sugar snap, English, and snow), and even carrots if done quickly. Once warm weather arrives, these plants will begin to suffer but should be OK into late March.



February is an ideal time to start seeds indoors, such as squash, melons, peppers, okra, etc., for transplanting into the garden next month. Many plants do just as well direct-seeded into the garden, but some folks prefer to get a jump on things. Tomatoes can still be started from seed now (though doing it in January would have been better), though I prefer to buy plants already started. If you have a favorite heirloom variety, growing your own from seed is often the only alternative.



Speaking of tomatoes, I try to get mine in the ground by the end of February. I know this seems early, but tomatoes need to be planted as soon as all danger of frost is past, or as soon as you feel you can adequately protect them. They need to get established so they will bloom before it gets too hot. If you wait until mid-March to plant your tomatoes, you have largely missed the boat. Once temperatures start getting into the 90's and nighttime temps stay in the mid-70's, tomatoes don't set fruit well. So, if you have big plans for making your own salsa or canning some tomato juice, you'd better get those plants in the ground pronto!

Keep those trowels and mosquito repellent handy, because next month, it's on!