News Release

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Gardeners Hit To Do List for February and March

Spring has almost sprung. As the temperatures swing from the teens to the 50s, it’s hard to believe spring comes knocking in just another month. So, grab your garden gloves and get going. There’s plenty to do.

First, tackle your pruning jobs. January to mid-March is the best time to prune non-flowering trees and shrubs. (Cut flowering shrubs now and you’ll be chopping off flower buds.)

Make clean cuts with a sharp tool. Don’t make your cuts flush. Leave a little stub beyond that wrinkled ring (called a branch collar) where branch meets trunk to promote healing. Forget the sealing goo, too. Tree cuts heal best au naturel.

Michelangelo once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and I carved until I set him free.” So you must do when pruning shrubs and trees. Envision the ideal and take everything else away.

Go easy. Never remove more than a third of the plant at a time to avoid harming it. Some pruning jobs are best tackled as 2- or 3-year projects. Patience is a virtue.

Learn more by downloading a free pruning publication from our Home and Garden Information Center website at www.hgic.umd.edu. Click on publications, then online publications. Scroll down Ornamental Landscape Plants and Problems to find “Pruning Ornamental Plants” HG 84.

March is also the time to cut back your ornamental grasses. Tie the tops together with string so you don’t end up chasing bits across your lawn on a windy day (marvelous
amusement for your neighbors.) Cut a few inches above the crown and compost your trimmings.

Small grasses like fescues you can nip with hand pruners. Big boys need hedge trimmers. Time your cuts so you aren’t cutting into fresh, green growth or you’ll give your grasses lingering bad hair days.

Shrubs that bloom best on new wood – such as butterfly bush or bluebeard (*caryopteris*) – should be cut back now. This stimulates new growth which results in more bountiful blooms. Must you do this? No. Does it make a huge difference? Yes.

What else can you do in February and March? Plan your gardens on paper. Overseed your lawn if you didn’t do it in the fall. Pull winter weeds. Plant peas and onion sets as soon as the soil can be worked. And start seeds indoors or in cold frames.

Would you like to learn how to start plants from seed? Sign up for our Saturday, March 16, Master Gardener seed-starting workshop from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The cost is just $10 and you’ll learn how to start and care for seeds, set up grow lights, and time planting. Request a registration form at dwoodring@umd.edu or 301-791-1304.

Enjoy the warming of the soil, the anticipation of dirty hands, and the satisfaction of getting an early start to the gardening season.

Annette Ipsan is the Extension educator for horticulture and the Master Gardener program in Washington County for the University of Maryland in Washington County. She can be reached at 301-791-1604 or aipsan@umd.edu.