EARLY SPRING GARDEN CHORES
Annette Ipsan, Frederick County Master Gardener Program

All of us are anxious to see bulbs sprouting, buds unfurling and color splashed throughout the garden. And yes, even though it is a bit early to get your hands in the dirt, there is plenty you can do to gear up for the gardening season.

March is a great month for trimming and tidying. Now is when you should cut back your ornamental grasses. Hand pruners do a good job on smaller clumps, but hedge trimmers are handy for larger clumps. Hold or tie the old growth with twine and cut the grass 4-6 inches from the ground. Compost the old growth and look for new, green shoots to appear in a few weeks.

Most roses appreciate a good pruning now, too. Consult a good rose book for the best methods to trim your type of rose since timing and methods vary widely with individual cultivars. Floribunda, hybrid tea, climbing, shrub and miniature roses all have different care guidelines.

Many trees and shrubs can be pruned in March, too. Fruit trees, evergreens, many deciduous trees, raspberry canes, grapevines and more can all be trimmed and shaped before new growth begins. Armed with good hand pruners, loppers and a pruning saw, you can tackle all but the biggest of jobs. One of your best tools is a good pruning book that will give you specific techniques for trimming the plants in your yard. Get more tips at the Master Gardener's pruning seminar on March 21, detailed below.

Don't forget your perennial beds. Start cutting back the plants that you left standing for winter interest. By now you've probably noticed the first green swirls of new growth on your 'Autumn Joy' sedum, so you can cut off the spent flowers. The birds have picked clean the seeds from your purple coneflower and liatris, so those attractive seed heads can get snipped off, too.

Get a jump on the season by edging and weeding your beds. By digging and teasing out weeds now when they are small, you save yourself countless hours of weeding in the summer heat. Cutting in a neat edge on your garden beds also slows weeds' progress and gives your landscape a neat, professional appearance.

Now is the time to start watering trees and shrubs that you planted in the fall. Newly planted trees and shrubs need supplemental watering for a full year to stay healthy, grow good roots and flower well. As soon as you see new leaves appear, start watering. A slow, steady watering is best. Try using a hose on a slow trickle or a soaker hose to water deeply and well.

A pre-season check is a great idea this time of the year. Are your garden tools ready for the busy gardening season? Check them and fix, sharpen or replace them as necessary. Take a stroll around your yard. Did rabbits, mice or deer damage any plants? Do any need to be repaired or
replaced? Start a list for your garden center. Flip through your garden journal and start a list of "must do" projects. By the time your list is done, spring will be here.

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit www.frederick.umd.edu/mg or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Find us on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland

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