

ALMANAC

Spring 2020



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The Garden Guy respects and supports all logical efforts to . . . reduce the use of paper, and the avoidable impact on our nation's landfills.



About The Author



Through my many years, I have perfected my gardening skills and expanded my knowledge and experience as a gardening instructor, speaker, author, certified nursery consultant, and most recently blogger.

I was introduced to gardening at the very early age of 8. I lived across the street from a man who gardened his little slice of heaven on about 5 acres of semi-rural property in No. California. Mr. May had everything from honeybees to an orchard, and was very accommodating to the little boy from across the street. I spent hours shadowing Mr. May around his place, asking questions, making mental notes and scurrying across the street to try my hand in my parent's anemic yard. Eventually I got so good at applying Mr. May's know-how that I won the consent of my Mother to tend her flower beds; and my Dad gave me a vegetable garden plot in the corner of our backyard. I didn't know then that I was attracted to the science of the whole thing, but I could see the results and was very proud of the increase in blooms for my Mom, and the vegetable production that even I could appreciate as abundant. I was hooked.

High school and college left little time or opportunity to get in the dirt. But, I was rewarded and further encouraged by my zoology and botany classes and next tried my hand at tending a garden underneath the high porch and stairs of our apartment in No. New Jersey. It all came back to me and when we finally had our first home I had my first garden plot as an adult. Some early setbacks and a hankering to be more at-one with the earth, led me to the disciplines and sacrifices of French Bio-Intensive Organic Gardening. Yeah, I wore wing tips to work, but I had Berkenstocks in my heart as a young man in the late 70s.

Today, I live on a "rock" in Rocklin, CA and my active gardening is restricted to raised beds (even my lawn is a raised bed) and patio containers. But, I do keep up with the latest trends in gardening, the irreversible encroachment of the Government on our garden culture; and most importantly, those new to the pleasures of gardening. As a nursery consultant in the Garden Center of the world's leading home improvement store chain, I have even gained a faithful following of young adults with first home responsibilities and opportunities: and retired men and women who now have the time, focus, and inclination to finally develop a better understanding of gardening and hopes for its rewards.



Planning



One way to shake the cobwebs out of your Gardening Passion is to start planning (or continue planning if you got through the Winter pawing a Seed Catalog) this year's Garden adventures. Categories can include: repeat planting, plant restorations and recoveries, relocation of plants or beds, or the building of new beds; plus a SHOPPING LIST for the plants and materials you think you will need from the Garden Center.

Fall is the best time of year to plant a landscape shrub or tree. Spring is the second best time. But, you have to remember that the air will warm before the chill is out of the soil. Second, the soil may be saturated from recent heavy rains. This is a balancing act to be sure. Wait long enough for conditions to improve - but, not so long as to push the establishment of roots too far into this year's hot weather.

One way to get a jump on things is to consider plans for your first, or additional raised beds. Enthusiasm for Raised Bed Gardening continues to grow among "boomers" who are finding that most anything raised up off the ground is a blessing. Fortunately it is a blessing you can measure in inches.

In addition to making it easier to reach, raised beds are the perfect place to experiment with Square Foot Gardening. Born out of the French Bio-intensive methods so popular in the 1980s, SFG is a very practical way to get more from less. In addition to greater abundance from a smaller space, you will save on water and fertilizer while enjoying a bigger yield. SFG also does much to encourage vegetable gardening year round offering easier soil management and crop rotation for Spring, Summer and Fall plantings of Warm Season and Cool Season vegetables.

Considering the water savings possible with Raised Beds, you might be inspired to step back and consider what plans you might be able to make for the general reduction of water use in your landscapes and garden beds. If this sounds a bit tedious, grab your water bill from last August and take it for a stroll through your yard ! Aside from timer settings, most property owners haven't taken the time to seriously think about the measures they can take in the area of water conservation. Sustainable reductions in volume and duration are a start. Exchanges in water delivery are another. Last year I began a campaign to remove automatic sprinklers from your landscape beds and substitute a single full length drip hose down the center of each bed. Because this is low pressure delivery (the faucet is only turned about 1/4 turn) this offers a " Slow 'n Low" approach to landscape irrigation.



Planting



Yeah I know. You have cabin fever and you would like to get out there and dig in the dirt. Well unfortunately for most of America the ground is cold, if not frozen. If you have to, lets just keep it confined to the pots on your patio. Or any other containers in your yard.

If you are already having visions of vegetables . . . you could start some seeds indoors. You will have to be able to warm the soil, as that is the signal for the little puppies to sprout.

I have already planted some of my patio containers with a few of the Cool Season Annuals still available in the Garden Center. These will give me quite a bit of color for Spring; and at least a little dirt under the fingernails.

The ground is sloooooowwwly starting to warm. If you have raised beds you can accelerate the process by laying black plastic over the soil.

In most cases, it's not too early to start cultivating some flower and garden beds. Just be sure to know what is planted in the ground you mean to till. And, if it's an existing bed . . . keep it shallow especially around shrubs like Roses which have shallow roots.

If you still have neglected to collect last years leaf and blossom litter from around trees and shrubs do it for sure this month. The warming temperatures will awaken the diseases and insects that have been snuggled in them all winter. Unless you have a working compost pile that will soon reach temps above 140°, dispose of the litter in your rubbish removal Garden Waste can.

You could also begin thinking about mulching with clean fresh mulch. Mulch where you don't want weeds, want to keep roots cooler in the Summer and/or want to conserve moisture.

Now, if you are really anxious and adventurous, you might think about purchasing and assembling what you need to build one or more of Skip's "Tomato Machine". The sturdy wire cage is wrapped in clear plastic you give your earliest tomato plantings the little hot house they need to give you a jump on the neighbors. In a normal Spring, you could have Early Girls or Husky Sweet Cherry tomatoes by the end of May !



Utilizing Skip's Tomato Machine will help you get a jump on tomato production this season.

Fertilizing



Spring is surely the most important time of year for fertilizing. For these two reasons. First, most property owners if pressed can't remember if they did or didn't put their lawns and landscapes to bed for the Winter with a full tummy ! Second, if they did, the heavy rains of the Winter months have in most cases diluted or even completely leached out any remnants of last year's plant fertilizers.

So now is the time to finally put the boxes of Christmas decoration UP, dig behind the snow skies and boards and see if you can find the fertilizer spreader in the last place you left it. Just as an aside, how deeply buried your spreader is may give you some idea as to when you did actually use it last !

Now the fertilizer. If you did find some, stop to identify the type of fertilizer it is and how old it might be. If it's in a bag, is it still loose and dry ? And, is it more than one season old ? If it is damp or older than one season dispose of it. So, off to the Garden Center.

In March, what color is your yard and garden struggling to produce ? Green ! And, what fertilizer component makes things green? NITROGEN. The N in NPK. So you are shopping for a fertilizer with some amount of Nitrogen on the box, bag, or bottle.

Now here is where you have to be careful. Nitrogen, in too high a dosage and the wrong application can have serious consequences. For example, you take a fresh measure of high volume nitrogen home and casually spread too thick on your favorite ground cover and you may burn holes in it. If it does get to the soil, the tender little feeder roots your shrub or tree worked all winter to produce . . . could be burned as well.

And, please don't buy Ammonium Sulfate (21-0-0) for your lawn just because that's the way your forefathers kicked off the growing season. That stuff is like heroine for your grass. It greens real well and cranks up the color in your grass - but, it is an incomplete fertilizer with nothing else to support the on-going growth and good health of your lawn.

For my money, I like to ease into the whole nitrogen for greening thing. For example, I like to start my tomato plants (yes, I have already planted my first plant - you remember Skip's Tomato Machine of course) with a low dose fish fertilizer (5-1-1) in freshly composted soil. This protects the roots until they are established. Later I will move to a regular feeding of high nitrogen as mature tomato plants are high nitrogen feeders and demand a weekly water soluble, or monthly granular, applications.

Finally, nearly every plant in your yard needs a Spring feeding. A bag of balanced and complete 16-16-16 time release granular fertilizer is suitable for nearly all garden plants. This medium weight fertilizer is balanced and complete with nutrients necessary for the wellbeing of plants. The only exception of note are those "acid loving" plants like your azaleas and rhododendrons which will profit from an acid supported 4-3-4 formula.



Prevention



You might think you still have time to head to the Garden Center for a bag of Scotts™ Lawn Fertilizer with **HALTS®**, and you do, but not to make any use of the Crabgrass control in this specialized fertilizer. This is March and the horse is out of the barn in that you should have put this fertilizer down in January, early February at the latest.

More to the point, if you had any intentions of overseeding or repairing some part of your lawn with seed . . . putting this down now would postpone such efforts for at least 3 months as the Halts pre-emergent formulation keeps all turf seeds from germinating, including the lawn seed you had in mind.

You would instead do better to examine your lawn for the appearance of any broad leaf weeds that may have shown up this month, or still might by month's end. If you do spot something growing in amongst your grass blades, they are most probably broad leaf weeds that could be controlled by an application of Scotts™ Lawn Fertilizer with Weed Control. This specific herbicide will, when applied, stick to the weed leaves and kill this generation of weed before they can sow a new generation of their seeds !

As you make that outside pass with the fertilizer spreader you might have glanced over and admired the tender young shoots just sprouting from your favorite rose plant. Soon your admiration will be shared with aphids whose whole meaning in life is to literally suck the life (and juices) out of your promising rose stems. But, not if you get there first. Now is the perfect time to apply a systemic pesticide to your roses and any other plants whose early Spring tender shoots have arrived. The systemic you apply (as granules or drenching liquid) is taken in by the roots, goes up into the tissue of the plant. Any damaging insect that chews or sucks (like aphids) will die and be controlled before egg laying begins. The really good news . . . you have used a rifle instead of a shotgun and killed only the damaging insects and saved the beneficial insects from harm !

We've already discussed the benefits to cleaning up leaf and blossom litter. While you are doing this, be alert to finding collections of snail shells. Such a collection is usually the sign that the location was the "home" for these mostly nocturnal, and voraciously hungry pests. It was to this shelter that they likely returned to suffer the timely death induced by your prudent application of snail bait. The lesson here, unlike Mad Dogs and Englishmen . . . you're not likely to see a big fat juicy garden snail out in the hot, dry mid-day sun. When you find a likely snail's nest . . . an overturned pot, a pile of damp wood, dismantled garden art or any other setting likely to give snails shelter from the day's heat and bright light . . . remove their "home". This will help to keep them at bay.



Aphids
On
Tender
New
Growth.

Wishing You Every Success

I hope you have found this
Spring Almanac
valuable and inspiring.

Gardening is just one of the interests enjoyed by my league of faithful followers who have shared many of my experiences through one of my personally authored publications:

- WEBSITE skipsoutdoorliving.com
- BLOG skipsoutdoorliving.com/blog
- RESOURCES skipsoutdoorliving.com/resources
- CONTACT skip@skipsoutdoorliving.com



Better Outdoor Living With Every Visit !

is divided into these main areas of interest

**Yard and Garden
Outdoor Cooking
Patio Living**

