

ACTON GARDEN CLUB

HORTICULTURE HINTS

March 2025

As the daylight increases and days become warmer and the snow and ice melt, we look for the coming of spring. There are some things that can be done this month weather permitting.

Color Indoors

To bring color indoors at this time of year, force branches of any number of woody shrubs such as: flowering quince, flowering cherry, forsythia, magnolia, crabapple, pussy willow, bush honeysuckle, serviceberry, fothergilla, redbud, witch hazel or red maple. Bring the cut shoots indoors and place them in a vase of water in a cool location; replace the water every couple of days. Shoots should flower in 1-3 weeks; others may take longer like crab apple and magnolia which may take 4-5 weeks.

Wet Soils

Wet soils in March are susceptible to compaction by heavy equipment, materials or foot traffic. Compacted soils will have poor drainage and water infiltration. Compacted soils impede root growth and may become anaerobic, limiting plant growth. Using plywood sheets will help distribute the weight of heavy equipment or materials.

Lawn

Be mindful that foot traffic on the lawn can cause compaction of wet soil resulting in poor growth of turf grass. Repair damaged turf before the grass resumes growth. Fix areas that were damaged by snow removal equipment. Use a landscape rake or leaf rake to fix areas damaged by voles and moles. A vigorous raking is helpful to remove turfgrass foliage that has become matted or damaged by snow molds.

Ornamental Grasses

Cut back ornamental grasses of any size, giving them a hard trim right to the ground before the new growth begins,

Pruning

March is a good time to prune trees, shrubs and perennials.

Prune trees removing dead and crossing branches and shape for good structure.

Remove browned leaves of rhododendrons but be careful in removing branches since there may be viable leaf or flower buds. Damaged leaves will fall off naturally with a few hard rains, and the stems will re-leaf. Prune butterfly bush, smoke tree, caryopteris, holly, yew and the blackened branches of colored-twig dogwood,.

Shear any perennials left standing last fall such as epimedium and sedum, Trim off browned leaves from hellebores early.

Soil Test

Have your garden and lawn soil tested this month to see if any amendments are needed. Go to soiltest.umass.edu for complete information on taking and sending a sample to the UMass Soil Testing Lab. The Soil Analysis tests for pH, major and micro nutrients and also lead provides recommendations based on what is being grown.

House Plants

Do some housekeeping on indoor plants. Use a soft, moist cloth to remove any dust from foliage plants, Dust can hinder photosynthesis. Pinch back shoots that may have become leggy due lower winter light conditions such as geraniums and coleus. Check frequently for insect pests and watering needs as daylength and sunlight intensity increase. Fertilize plants showing new growth with a water-soluble or slow-release fertilizer. Begin repotting pot bound plants as needed.

Garden Tools

If you have not done so this winter, clean, disinfect and sharpen loppers, pruning shears and handsaws. Since bleach can corrode the metal blades of pruning tools, use a strong household cleaner instead like Lysol at full strength. It can be an effective and less corrosive.

Note: If you have questions about how to prune a particular plant, check what books are available at the library or for purchase. I have used *The Pruning Book* by Lee Reich.

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Environmental Education