



**10-Minute University™**  
*Oregon Master Gardener™ Association – Clackamas County Chapter*  
*In Cooperation with Oregon State University Extension Service*



## Spring Gardening Tips

On the first warm spring day, most gardeners get the urge to work the soil. Stay off! It is wise to check the soil first. Hold a handful of soil and squeeze it tightly. If the soil stays in the form of a ball, walking and digging will compact it.

But don't wait too long to start your clean up. Spring is the ideal time for many tasks. Below are some of the most important.

### **Annuals and Perennials**

Remove dead annual plants that remained through the winter. Prune herbaceous perennials to the ground once you see new growth at the base of the plants. In milder areas of our region, some perennial plants never go dormant. Plants from genera *Epimedium*, *Hellebores*, *Heuchera* and bearded iris retain their leaves all winter. Trimming back the tattered foliage in spring will encourage new growth to come in.

### **Ornamental Grasses**

If you left your deciduous ornamental grasses up for winter interest, you can cut them back as soon as you see new growth (probably sometime in February). Cut grasses to a few inches above the ground. Groom evergreen grasses by combing with fingers to refresh; prune the tips to remove winter damage.

### **Evergreens**

Most evergreens may require some tidying up of damaged foliage. Spring is a good time to fertilize evergreens when they begin to grow actively. Fertilize every other year if the soil is healthy and rich. Look for a fertilizer for evergreens.

### **Trees and Shrubs**

Pruning keeps trees and shrubs in shape, gets rid of dead and diseased wood, and encourages new growth. Early spring is a good time to prune deciduous woody plants because their structures are fully revealed. Beware that spring bloomers set their flower buds last fall so pruning now would lose some blossoms.

### **Weeding**

Take action as soon as you can. Weed seeds live many years and winter rain nourish them. You will find pulling weeds easier with damp soil. Don't compost weeds.

### **Soil, Mulch, and Fertilizer**

Test your soil before adding anything. If you amended soil in the fall, check to see the result. Most plants enjoy a good feeding in the spring when they begin a growth spurt. If you have rich, healthy soil, all you should need to do in the spring is a bit of top dressing with compost, manure or a complete slow release organic fertilizer. If you prefer synthetic fertilizers, apply them when plants show signs of new growth.

Mulch does many wonderful things: conserves water, cools plant roots, feeds the soil, and smothers weeds. Wait until the soil warms up and dries out a bit before adding mulch. Be sure to keep it away from the

stems and crowns of plants. Leave the beds where desirable self-seeders are; add mulch only after they germinate.

### **Disease and Insect Control**

Identify problems before acting, and opt for the least toxic approach. Cultural, physical and biological controls are the cornerstones of a sustainable pest management program. Use chemical controls only after you identify a pest problem and carefully read the pesticide label. Least-toxic choices are insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, botanical insecticides and organic and synthetic pesticides. These recommendations might not apply to all areas of Oregon. For more information, contact your local OSU Extension office.

### **Compost pile**

It's best to start a new pile in spring and leave your old pile to flip and use. Most plant debris can go into the compost pile. Dispose of anything that shows signs of disease and seed heads, weeds or not.

If you don't compost, consider starting one. Begin by collecting plant debris and leaves. Add equal amounts "brown" (carbon-rich) materials like dried leaves and straw and "green" (nitrogen-rich) materials like grass clippings and fresh leaves in even layers with water. Turn regularly. Continue adding to the pile throughout the season for rich, homemade compost next spring. To speed decomposition, cut up the plant materials.

### **Housekeeping Chores**

- Tune up **tools**. Make note of what is missing and order tools for the new growing season.
- Choose **new plants** for the garden. Order perennials, trees, and shrubs for spring planting.
- Clear the **lawn** of winter debris and look for areas that need reseeding. Have the mower blades sharpened. If necessary, refill oil, install fresh spark plugs, and lubricate moving parts.
- Make **new planting beds** by removing sod, weeds, and debris. Spread a 4-inch layer of compost or well-rotted manure and any amendments over soil, cultivate to 10 to 12 inches with a spading fork or rototiller. Take care not to over till the soil.
- Learn about **sheet mulching** for making new beds for fall planting.
- Clean **Bird Feeders and Baths**. Scrub with weak bleach solution (1/4 cup bleach in 2 gallons warm water). Rinse and dry. Change water weekly in bird bath. Clean baths and feeders regularly throughout the season.

### **Resources**

Visit your OSU Extension Service office at 200 Warner-Milne Road, Oregon City or online at

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>

Get Northwest Gardeners eNews at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/enews>

### **Master Gardener™ Advice**

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas), 503-821-1150 (Washington), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah).
- For 10-Minute University™ handouts, visit [www.cmastergardeners.org](http://www.cmastergardeners.org) or [www.metromastergardeners.org](http://www.metromastergardeners.org)
- Look for Master Gardeners at area Farmers' Markets.

*Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials without discrimination based on age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.*