

Amy's March Horticultural Tasks

Annuals

The average last frost date in Columbia is March 26th, which means spring is just around the corner. The blowing winds can dry out winter annuals, so be sure to keep them well watered. It's too early to plant warm season annuals, but you can prepare the planting beds that they'll go into. Mix in compost, and pay close attention to the sun and shade conditions. There's a big difference to your plants between morning sun and afternoon sun. If your bed receives afternoon shade, then plant shade-loving plants. Also, measure the size of your bed. This is important to know when purchasing plants, because the tags that come with the plants will tell you how far apart to space them. You can save money by not buying too many plants for the space.

Turf

Warm season grasses such as Centipede, Bermuda grass, Zoysia, and St. Augustine grasses need to have a pre-emergent herbicide applied when the Forsythia (Yellow Bells) shrubs are blooming. Avoid purchasing combination Weed & Feed products offered in many big box retail stores. They are purchased by the store for the entire nation, and the northern states do not have warm season grasses. Do not fertilize warm season grasses until they come out of dormancy or "green up", which will likely be in April. If you wait until April to apply pre-emergent herbicide, then it will be too late to prevent weeds in your lawn. To know how much herbicide to buy, measure the length of the yard and multiply by the width. This will give you the square footage. Read the label of the herbicide to find out how much square footage a bag will cover. Generally, the bags cover 2500 to 5000 square feet. The late March and April are some of the best times to treat fire ants. Fire ants will burrow down deep when the weather is cold or hot, but will be very active in spring and fall. Walk your property looking for ant mounds. One of the best products on the market is "Over & Out". It takes about six weeks to completely remove the ants, but control can last for up to three years because it kills the queen. Well worth the wait!

Perennials

Overcrowded perennials can be divided now.

Roses

Keep your newly planted roses watered and fertilized. As a general rule, you should avoid getting the leaves wet to prevent the leaf spot that many roses are prone to getting. If you want to plant a rose that seems resistant to leaf spot, try the 'Knockout' roses.

Shrubs

There's much confusion about pruning shrubs. As general rule, if the shrub blooms in the spring do not prune it until it has finished blooming. Otherwise, prior to spring growth is a good time to cut back shrubs to encourage new growth. If you just want to maintain the shape of a hedge, clip off the lighter green growth when it emerges in the spring. Monitor shrubs for insects.

Trees

March is still a good time to plant trees through the end of the month.

Amy Bledsoe is an International Certified Arborist, Certified Environmental Landscaper, and Landscape Designer for the City of Columbia, She was the recipient of the 2002 Horticulture Student of the Year award from the SC Nursery and Landscape Association. She's a Certified Nursery Professional, and has been in the horticultural industry for several years as a garden center employee, lecturer, consultant, and designer. She serves as an advisor to the Columbia Green board, and is a member of the SC Nursery and Landscape Association and the Greater Columbia Landscape Association. She has consulted on gardening articles for Columbia Metropolitan magazine, and The State newspaper, appeared on ETV's "Making It Grow", and also been a radio guest on "The Andy Thomas Show" to answer on air gardening questions.