



This Month in the Garden

by Lorraine Van Slooten

Mark your calendar for March 20, 6:29 am EDT and celebrate the arrival of a long-awaited spring.

We'll get outside to see what the winter has wrought and look for signs of new life in the garden. And we'll remember why we love gardening: nature heals and restores. Happy spring.

Seed Startin' Season – Read; research; plan. Make a list, draw a map, and see what will REALLY fit. Figure in rotating crops and how much time it takes to get your seeds going. It's easy to be tempted by all those beautiful catalog photos and descriptions, but the bottom line is – how much produce can you use? (50+ cucumbers harvested in a three-day period last summer really brought this one home!)


When the seeds arrive, figure out the starting dates and put them in chronological order. Serious seed starters make a calendar of what to start and when, keep notes on germination time, and time needed to mature to planting size. Keep unused seed in the original packet; fold over the top, paperclip it, and keep in a paper bag or envelope. Don't keep seeds in plastic that can trap moisture and invite fungal growth.

Zone Out – Erie County plant hardiness zones range from 5a (-20° to -15° F), to 5b (-15° to -10° F) to 6a (-10° to -5° F). So, planting, pruning, transplanting, dividing, and sowing advice can vary significantly from one end of the county to the other. Along with some interestingly atypical weather patterns

and micro-climates, it becomes more challenging to pick the right time for garden tasks. Structure your chore list into two lists: 1.) IF the snow melts/ground defrosts/soil begins to dry, and 2.) **if NOT**. Keep off the soil if it's soggy and protect the soil structure. For the adventurous among you, I saw a suggestion that early pruning be done on snowshoes! Now, that's a hardy gardener!

Support Group – Plan and order the supports, (rings, grids, linking stakes, poles, etc.), you'll need to keep flowers and vegetables from flopping this year. The right support can increase yield in the vegetable garden, make harvesting easier and reduce disease. In the flower border, they can increase the visual appeal of a plant, improve air circulation to help prevent disease, and "tidy up" the garden. Most local nurseries will carry what you need and specialty items can be found on a variety of websites: gardeners.com, burpee.com, plantsupports.net.

Before or After? – Pruning decisions in the early spring come down to before bud break or after. Bud break being the opening of a dormant bud, when the shoot begins to grow. For the March gardener, Cornell recommends these be pruned before bud break: roses, rose-of-Sharon, glossy abelia, butterfly bush, bluebeard, dogwood with brightly colored bark, St. John's Wort, Russian sage, privet, false spirea, and snowberry. Decide whether you are pruning for maintenance or for rejuvenation of the plant. Download this excellent resource from Cornell to guide you in your pruning decisions and keep it as a comprehensive resource: Pruning: An Illustrated Guide to Pruning Ornamental Trees and Shrubs. Just type the title in your browser or go to ecommons.cornell.edu.

And then – start to increase water and fertilizer for indoor plants; wait to prune maples, birches, elm until after they leaf out; cut back grasses; tamp back perennials that have heaved; visit a local maple sugar house; take your lawnmower in for a tune-up; plant pansies; gradually remove mulch from strawberries and perennials; apply dormant oil sprays as needed; trim dead and browned material from perennials; Celebrate the equinox. 



21 South Grove Street
East Aurora, NY 14052