

## March in Your Garden:

Finally it's warming up enough to worry about those weeds. The best way to control weeds in the garden is to pluck them out now before they get a strangle-hold. Moisten the soil if the weather hasn't done it for you, and tug those weeds out gently, roots and all. If you didn't prepare planting areas with compost in February, add it in now, plus some mulch. Almost all plants will love some nitrogen as spring arrives. So feed with an all-purpose fertilizer. But wait until camellias, rhodies and azaleas have finished blooming before rewarding them with an acid fertilizer.

Control aphids now while they are just getting active. I put on rubber gloves and use a jet stream from my hose to keep them off the Meyer lemon bushes. Go out in the early morning, before the snails return to their hide-outs, and pick a handful of snails. What you do with them depends on how violent you want to get. Either drop them in a bucket of soapy water, do a dance on the path, squishing them underfoot, or toss them in the street. Our cool weather can also promote rust on roses. Check the back of the leaves for reddish pustules. Strip the rose bush of any diseased leaves and then spray the plant with a fungicide that contains sulfur. March is when my roses start popping with leaves and growth. Our newsletter had Ray Redell's rose feeding schedule a few years back. For March and April, he recommends in the first week of each month using a high-nitrogen water soluble fertilizer like 31-0-0 ammonium nitrate or 21-0-0 ammonium sulfate. Then the third week of March and April he scratches in 3/4 cup of Epsom salts per bush.

Instead of planting baby seedlings of annuals and perennials, I seek out 6-packs when they arrive in the nursery, usually on Friday morning, and then transfer them to 4 inch pots to grow for a few weeks while I improve the soil. That gives the seedlings a head start, and enables them to survive a snail attack. March is a really good time to divide perennials like daisies, agapanthus, and daylilies. If you don't have room for your divisions, put the extra divided plants in gallon containers and give them away.

For a vegetable garden, I start eggplant, spinach and Swiss chard from seed. When they are about an inch tall, I start feeding them with diluted, all-purpose, water soluble fertilizer. Eventually I move the flats onto shelves along the sheltered side of the house. I don't bother planting tomatoes from seeds. The Master Gardeners have a great heirloom tomato sale, and others are advertised in the garden section of the Mercury News in April. They do the work of growing heirloom seedlings for you so you can grow one of each. A few reminders about tomatoes: the "experts" say that the tomatoes should be rotated to another garden spot every year to prevent soil borne diseases. I gave up looking for new sunny spots about ten years ago. I now grow tomatoes in wine barrels, two plants to a barrel. I dump out more than half of the soil every fall, before replacing the tomatoes with winter vegetables. Then in the spring, I add more compost to that soil, along with a fish head and some chicken manure and egg shells.

Other vegetable seedlings start showing up at nurseries about the middle of March, so I look for broccoli, onion sets, arugula, Bok Choi and all its relatives, like Pak choy, if my over-winter veggies start fading out. If am still harvesting my winter veggies, like snow peas, Swiss chard, broccoli, Napa cabbage, kale, and bok choy, I take my time with the summer veggies, not rushing them into the ground until maybe the end of April or early May. Some years it doesn't warm up until May, so the tomatoes and string beans and egg plants are waiting patiently in gallon containers, expecting the winter veggies to be pulled out.