



March in the Garden

I always wait to feed my roses until the ground warms up at night to 50 degrees. That is about to happen in March. Then I start following Ray Redell's Rose Feeding Formula: MARCH & APRIL, First week – feed with granular, water soluble fertilizer concentrated in nitrogen, 21-0-0 (ammonium sulfate), found at Summer Winds and at Ace Hardware.

The third week – feed with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Epson salts per bush and water in well. Epson salts (magnesium sulfate) activates the plant enzymes needed for the growth process. I found 2 lb. bags at Summer Winds. I use the industrial version of Epsom salts because I am feeding 52 roses on my property. If you only have one or two roses, you could use Epsom salts.

My Azaleas, Rhodies, and Camellias are still blooming so I will wait until they are finished to feed them. That is also the best time to prune them for shape, and to cut out dead stems. If they grow long shoots in summer, you can also prune the shoots back then, since those shoots usually do not develop buds. Hydrangeas can also be pruned in March. If you want big flowers, leave fewer stems on the bush. The more stems you leave, the smaller but more plentiful will be the flowers.

For the rest of my garden, I wake up plants by feeding them. I like EB Stone Organic fertilizers. They have vegetable, citrus and flower foods plus Azalea and Camellia food, all of which contain mycorrhizae to enrich the soil. March is the time to plant seeds and add spring flowers to perk up the garden.

In February, I got my 2 vegetable plots ready for Spring veggies. I added compost from my own bins, and mixed it into the raised beds. After the veggies get planted, I will spread mini-mulch from Ciardella's, which breaks down and eventually enriches the soil. Mulch also helps control weeds, and helps keep moisture in the soil.

This is the right month to fertilize citrus, especially if their leaves are yellow, indicating iron deficiency. I love my Meyer lemons that are in large pots. I feed them every 6 weeks all year, by listing the feeding time on my calendar. I use Jobe's Fertilizer Spikes for Container-grown Fruit and Citrus. The lemon shrubs get fluffed, pruned, and new soil this month. I feed container plants more frequently than the same plant in the soil, because surely some of that fertilizer gets washed out of the pot every time they are watered.



My veggie plots are empty! I got spoiled by buying Swiss chard, spinach, eggplant and onions in 4 in. pots in February over the last five years. This year, I have yet to find any veggies, but Summer Winds told me that they will have some the middle of March. I get too impatient waiting for the seeds to germinate and grow, so I will hold out for startups in the near future.

And, this is the right time to wage war on slugs and snails. I've heard that Coors is the beer of choice for most snails. Put the beer in a shallow container so the rim is at soil level, enabling the snail to crawl in. I think they get too drunk to crawl out. Don't let the rain dilute their drink of choice.



I never plant tomatoes from seed! The Master Gardeners have a great heirloom tomato sale, usually advertised in the Mercury News garden section in April. **Also Gamble Garden will be selling tomatoes during their Virtual Spring Tour April 23-25. Check their web site for details.**

I will be part of a **Gamble Garden Zoom class on growing tomatoes, March 27, 9:30-11:30 AM.** You can go to gamblegarden.org to find the class on their web site. Gamble Garden will email all registered attendees the class Zoom link 1-2 days prior to the class.

If you do not have a Zoom account, download Zoom and create a free account prior to the class.

I have a special collection of ingredients that I add to the tomato hole before the tomato goes in the soil. First, I remove about two inches of the soil in my wine barrels, where the tomatoes are grown, and add more of my home-grown compost. Next, I add a list of ingredients that I got years ago from Love Apple Farms:

1 fish head,

2 crushed eggshells, one 1/2 cup bone meal, one 1/2 cup all-purpose timed release organic fertilizer, 2 T. worm castings, 2 aspirin tablets. Before planting the tomatoes, I also strip the lower leaves off, leaving only two sets of leaves on the plant, then bury the stem up to those two sets of leaves. The tomato gets stronger and grows new roots. This planting formula keeps the tomatoes happy until about the fourth of July, when I add some all-purpose fertilizer around each tomato.

March is a very good time to divide clumps of perennials. Rudbeckia, Gaillardia, Agapanthus, Echinacea all can be divided in early Spring, or towards the end of March. They all have a spreading root system and some can be dug up and pulled apart by hand. I have dwarf Agapanthus, and after three years, I chop them with a spade into four equal parts, then pull apart even more of those quarters, put them in 4 inch pots or gallon cans, and they are ready to plant in a month or two.

Happy Gardening,

Vicki Sullivan
Horticulture Chair