

**Special Interest
Articles:**

- Ornamental grasses add pizzazz.
- Creating a wildlife habitat.
- The scoop on stink bugs.

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Spring Gardening Tips

Spring Garden Priorities

Unlike in recent years, spring gardening tasks this year need not be dominated by cleaning up from storm damage or plant die-back from extreme cold temperatures. Instead, focus on routine maintenance. This includes trimming back perennials that remained standing for winter interest. The blooming of the *Forsythia* is the marker

for many early spring tasks, including applying weed pre-emergent to lawns and gardens. This is the time to prune roses. Many other plants that bloom late (i.e., not early spring) should be pruned before new buds emerge. (Early blooming plants, like Azaleas, have set their buds long ago and should not be trimmed until after blooming.) Many other evergreen

shrubs that are overgrown can be pruned now (with certain exceptions – e.g., Japanese hollies are pruned much later). Certain common multi-stemmed woody plants and perennials are appropriately cut back dramatically at this time – to within a foot of the ground. **Continued p. 2**



Those Wily Weeds

Undoubtedly, the mild winter has contributed to the early appearance of hardy annual weeds throughout the lawn and gardens. They must be removed now before they flower, reseed and take over spring gardens. After removal of existing weeds (and other debris, such as leaves remaining from last year that have not decomposed) the first application of the year of weed pre-emergent should be made. Use of

products such as Preen or corn gluten can ameliorate weed problems if they are applied correctly – e.g., every 3-4 months. This will help prevent weed seeds from germinating, and must be done seasonally since different weed seeds germinate at different times. The product should be mixed into the soil, watered, and covered with mulch. It will not kill existing weeds, and even the most diligent use of

pre-emergents will not completely eliminate those weeds that sprout from seeds carried in by birds and other unavoidable sources such as wind. But gradually your weed problem will diminish if you keep up with the preventative treatment, do a modicum of hand weeding, and keep a nice layer of mulch in place.



“Early spring daffodils signals time to cut back certain multi-stemmed woody plants, such as Butterfly Bush (above), hard.”

Tip



Time saver

BEFORE CUTTING, TIE GRASS WITH DUCT TAPE OR ROPE TO MAKE DISPOSAL EASIER...



Spring Garden Priorities *continued from page 1*

Typical examples include *Buddleia* (Butterfly Bush), *Vitex* (Chaste-tree), *Perovskia* (Russian Sage), *Caryopteris* (Blue Mist), and *Callicarpa* (Beautyberry). This will keep these plants to a manageable size. Others include ornamental grasses and evergreen groundcovers such as *Liriope*. These are most efficiently cut

back with a power hedger, or just use shears. Other plants require selective pruning by hand to ensure that new growth is not accidentally nicked. *Hellebores* (Lenten Rose) produces new growth from the center of the plant, and the large old dying leaves must be delicately cut back to the base without damaging the new

growth. Deciduous shrubs are ideally pruned before they leaf out because their branch structure is apparent. Wayward growing or weak branches and suckers can be removed. The semi-evergreen *Nandina* can benefit when up to 1/3 of its largest stems are cut nearly to the ground to promote the plant's fullness.

Transplanting and Dividing

Early spring is the best time for dividing many plants, particularly later-- fall -- blooming perennials. If you noted last year issues, e.g., crowding, clashing, or poor growth, this is the time to transplant to a better location, or donate surplus plants to a friend or your compost pile. Dividing under-performing plants may give them a new lease on life.

Properties have micro-climates, and some plants simply perform better when moved to a different spot. Sometimes the need to divide a plant is obvious (stems spreading out and leaving the center with minimal foliage/flowers.) In general most perennials do better if divided periodically (the frequency varies with the species.)

**** Fertilization ****

Don't forget to apply Hollytone to evergreens, particularly acid-loving hollies, azaleas, and rhododendrons (after they bloom). This and compost can promote healthy broadleaf evergreens, which is important to withstand insect and fungal damage. Do not fertilize injured or weak plants – they need the maximum energy to heal.

Adding Annuals

Annuals are labor intensive – to plant and to maintain. The pain is worth the reward of continuous splashes of color all summer long. They are particularly useful to fill gaps between newer

perennials and shrubs that have yet to fill their spaces. Annuals should match the color scheme of your gardens – keeping to cool or warm hues, and not a busy distracting hodgepodge of colors. I purchase

and deliver them generally just after Mother's Day. If you'd like to join in the order, please contact us early. We also can help with planting annuals and preparing containers with annuals and other plants.

Ornamental Grasses Add Pizzazz

Every landscape should include a nice selection of ornamental grasses. They are very easy care plants – generally only needing shearing back close to the ground in early spring. They like lean soil – no need to fertilize. They are reliably deer resistant and pest free. They provide a range of benefits in the landscape – e.g., they make useful screening for much of the year (unless they deteriorate from heavy snow or other conditions, they should be left standing through the winter to provide interest for people and wildlife) and they can function as a

groundcover to keep weeds at bay and prevent erosion. They mostly thrive in sun and dry soil, but there are species that do fine in moist soil and some shade. The photos show examples of some of the smaller varieties – not necessarily plants used for large screening, but plants that can fit into most any landscape. They also perform nicely in containers.



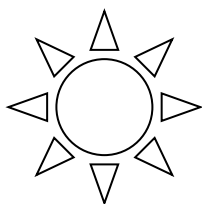
Color, texture, and form year-round



Calamagrostis brachytricha (Korean Feather Reed Grass), long lasting flowers and foliage



Nasella tenuissima (Mexican Feather Grass), 12-18" airy, graceful – singly or in groups.



Above: *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon' (Golden variegated Sweet Flag) tolerates wet soil and some shade



Above: *Muhlenbergia capillaris* (Pink Muhly Grass). Puffy pink cloudballs in late summer and fall, it tolerates heat, humidity, poor soil, and drought.

Top Right: *Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah' (Shenandoah Red Switch Grass). Modest (to 4') size, striking color. (Native)



Schizachyrium scoparium (Little Bluestem). Slender blue green stems, mahogany red white seed tufts in fall. (Native)

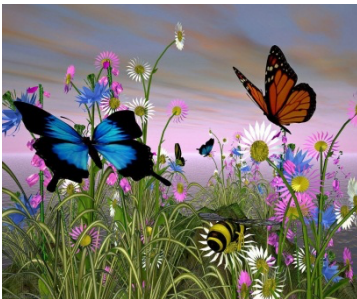
Ornamental grasses are easy care plants that provide year-round interest. A variety of colors and sizes – there is an ornamental grass to fit every landscape.

Sustainable Practice – Garden for Wildlife



All the buzz.....

It is fun, easy, and rewarding to have your property designated as a Certified Wildlife Habitat



The unusually mild winter has actually caused some plants to exhibit signs of 'winter burn'

Inviting wildlife into your garden is not only an important sustainable practice, but it makes your garden enjoyable and peaceful. Creating a haven for songbirds, butterflies, bees, frogs, and various pollinators is an important way to help restore habitat that has been diminished by

development and the trend towards large lush lawn areas. Installing native plants in your landscape can help restore habitat by providing food for native birds and insects. We enjoy designing gardens that are based on a variety of native species. The National Wildlife

Federation has established parameters to have property cited as an official Certified Wildlife Habitat by following simple steps to provide food, water, cover, and place for wildlife to raise their young. You can design a new garden to incorporate these elements or add them to your existing gardens.

Creating a Wildlife Habitat

Providing the elements of a wildlife habitat is easy and intuitive: **#1 Provide food:** adding native plants is the easiest way to provide the foliage, nectar, pollen, berries, seeds, and nuts that many wildlife species require. Supplemental feeders can augment your plants. **#2: Supply water:** water sources can range from

ponds or rain gardens to a simple birdbath. Wildlife need clean water for drinking, bathing, and reproduction. Even small puddles of water will help butterflies and other small creatures. **#3 Create cover:** native vegetation, evergreen and large flowering shrubs, thickets, and brush piles provide places for wildlife to hide and feel safe from people,

predators, and inclement weather. Finally, note that a wildlife garden can save you money – i.e., converting some lawn area to gardens will save the cost of mowing, seeding, and fertilizing, and you'll have more time to enjoy the cheer of butterflies, songbirds, and other interesting wildlife inhabitants.

Winter Damage – believe it or not

It is hard to believe, but the very mild winter can cause unexpected problems for plants. I recently had a *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Schipkaensis' (Skip Laurel) evaluated by the University of Maryland for strange signs of what appeared to be environmental damage, which is usually from salt or herbicide application around the

plant's root zone. "As enigmatic as it sounds, given the mild winter we have enjoyed," they concluded, the damage is likely 'winter burn.' They have seen many plants suffering similar signs – wide-scale bleaching, then browning, and dying off of leaves. The likely culprit: lack of cold weather in early winter, which kept the plants

from 'hardening off.' Consequently, they were not fully dormant and suffered during cool, dry periods.

Generally, because of the mild winter, we are about three weeks early compared to the typical year with respect to plant schedules (bloom development, etc.), and garden tasks should be modified accordingly.

Featured Pest: Brown Marmorated Stink Bug

Most people have noticed increased populations of *Halyomorpha halys*, commonly known as the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (BMSB), which was identified in Maryland in 2002. The pest, native to Asia, was introduced into the United States via trade goods shipments, and has rapidly spread through the East Coast and westward, mostly through transportation carriers.

Invading the House. The BMSB tends to seek warm shelter in houses in the fall and, therefore, caulking and sealing cracks, weather stripping, and otherwise eliminating entry points, are the best defense there. They tend to settle on sunny south-facing light colored house siding. If large numbers are found and removal is desired, it is suggested that they be vacuumed with a shop vac and deposited in the trash outside. Note – squashing them can produce a strong odor. Insecticides are not recommended for health reasons and questionable effectiveness.

Damage in the Garden.

Stink bugs can feed on numerous ornamental plants, with the adults causing major tissue damage by deep feeding. The young “nymphs” (very tiny, like small ticks or spiders) feed less deeply. There is more concern about damage to edible crops. In the residential setting, you might find tomatoes decimated. To protect plants, the bugs can be hand picked off or knocked into a container of soapy water – as is done with Japanese beetles.

Prospects. Research is ongoing. Regarding plants, for example, new tomato plant varieties said to be relatively resistant, have appeared on the market. Early ripening and shorter varieties are also said to fare better. Scientific studies for control options are ongoing. Because the BMSB was introduced into this country without its natural enemies, there are no natural control mechanisms available,

that keep many other pests managed. Hence, biological control options are the best bet for long-term management. Last year, stink bug traps became widely available. Similar to bee traps, these look like narrow cylinder-shaped lanterns that are hung in affected areas in a way to capture as many bugs as possible via ‘attractant’ material that is inserted. I have hung these on low tree branches touching deck rails (which they crawl up from the ground to reach the trap), and they have been very effective. The trap fills up with bugs (which have no escape route) and can be periodically dumped out. The same traps can be adapted for indoor use in the winter by inserting a small light accessory in lieu of the chemical attractant. This year’s mild winter seems to have ameliorated the indoor infestations somewhat, but the expectation is that the problem will grow.

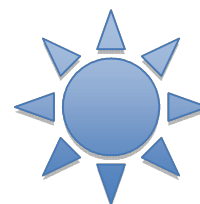
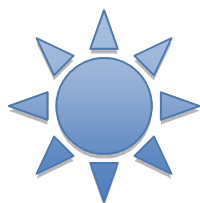


Above: “Stink bug” feeding on plant foliage and trap hanging on tree branch

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug immigrated from Asia and has no natural enemies here to keep the population under control. The creature’s odor and ‘buzzing’ can be annoying but otherwise harmless in the house.

One Final Word

Reminder: remove tree stakes one year after installation. Check and periodically loosen supports



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