

## Edibles: Fruits & Vegetables

Spring Equinox is March 20th. Happy first day of spring! If you start seeds indoors, you will have approximately 8 weeks until the average last frost date in our area. (May 15<sup>th</sup>)



### EXTRA

When sowing large seeds with hard coats, such as sweet peas, either nick the seed's coat with a sharp knife or scrape with a nail-file. This allows the seed readily to absorb moisture, an essential stage in germination.

- Vegetables: Any root crops such as horseradish, parsnips, Jerusalem artichokes, or carrots still in the ground from last year should be harvested before new green top growth appears.
- Vegetables: Cultivate weeds and remove the old, dead stalks of last year's growth from the asparagus bed before the new spears emerge.
- Vegetables: Fertilize the garden as the soil is being prepared for planting. Unless directed otherwise by a soil test, 1 to 2 pounds of 12-12-12 or an equivalent fertilizer per 100 square feet is usually sufficient.
- Fruits: Gradually remove mulch from strawberries as the weather begins to warm.
- Sow seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and cabbage indoors now (read seed package for weeks to sow before last frost) for transplanting into the garden later this spring.
- Grapes and bramble fruits may be pruned now.
- Finish pruning fruit trees. Start with apples and pears first. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- When pruning diseased branches, sterilize tools with a one-part bleach, nine parts water solution in between cuts. Dry your tools at day's end and rub them lightly with oil to prevent rusting.
- Established fruit trees can be fertilized once frost leaves the ground. Use about one-half pound of 12-12-12 per tree, per year of age, up to

a maximum of 10 pounds fertilizer per tree. Broadcast fertilizers over the root zone staying at least one foot from the tree trunk.

- If soil conditions allow, take a chance sowing peas, lettuce, spinach, and radish. If the weather obliges, you will be rewarded with extra early harvests.
- Sow celery seeds in boxes or pots in greenhouses, placing them in 55-61 °F.
- From now and until May, sow radishes thinly in drills ½ inch deep and 10 inches apart.
- Sow parsnip seeds in groups of three, 6-8 inches apart, ½ inch deep and in drills 15 inches apart. These are later thinned to the strongest seedling at each position.
- Sow sweet pea seeds ½ inch deep in seed trays and place in 61-68 °F. They can also be sown outdoors in April in the garden.
- Vegetables: Asparagus and rhubarb roots should be planted as soon as the ground can be worked.
- Fruits: Finish pruning grapes. Bleeding causes no injury to the vines. Tie vines to the trellis before the buds swell to prevent bud injury and crop loss. Save grape vine prunings for making into attractive wreaths and other craft objects.
- Fruits: Continue pruning apple trees. Burn or destroy all prunings to minimize insect or disease occurrence. If no disease is present, consider giving some apple prunings to people or pet rescues with rabbits. Apple branches are safe for rabbits to chew and help keep their teeth trimmed. (Maybe they would reciprocate by giving you some rabbit manure?)
- Sow onion seeds thinly in drills ½ inch deep and 9-12 inches apart.
- Vegetables: Sow fava beans 3 inches deep and 8 inches apart in drills 10-12 inches apart. Usually, they are sown in double rows, with a 2 feet wide path between each pair.
- Fruit: Soft fruits can still be planted. Also, check plants put in earlier, re-firming soil loosened by frost.
- Vegetables: Plant peas, lettuce, radishes, kohlrabi, mustard greens, collards, turnips, Irish potatoes, spinach, and onions (seeds and sets) outdoors.

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## Houseplants

- Houseplants begin actively growing. Begin fertilizing now and continue until September. I begin fertilizing around St. Patrick's Day. A phrase I use to remember when to begin fertilizing again is "The wearing of the green is time for the mixing of the blue (or whatever fertilizer you prefer)."
- As day lengths increase, plants begin new growth. Re-pot root-bound plants, moving them to containers 2 inches larger in diameter than their current pot. Check for insect activity and apply controls as needed. Leggy plants may be pruned now.
- Do not leave foliage houseplants continually in one position, as leaves and stems grow toward the light and eventually create an unsightly plant. Instead, turn the plant a quarter of a turn every few days.
- Tall and leggy house plants such as dracaena, dieffenbachia and rubber plants may be air layered now.
- When buying houseplants, avoid those with roots coming out of drainage holes in their pots. Also, do not buy house plants with pots covered with moss or algae, flowers fully open, or stems bare of leaves. Additionally, discard large plants in small pots or small plants in large pots.
- Consider using a moisture meter to help determine the water needed for houseplants.



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## Ornamentals and Lawns



## Ornamentals

- If herbaceous plants have not yet been tidied up and old shoots cut down, do this now. Also, fork lightly between plants, spreading well-rotted manure or compost between them.
- Flowers: Lift and divide large, congested clumps of herbaceous plants. Use a garden fork to dig up under the clump and to prize it gently apart. Replant young parts from around the outside. Discard the old, woody, central parts.
- Trees, shrubs, and perennials may be planted as soon as they become available at local nurseries. Do not plant annuals and bedding plants until after May 15<sup>th</sup>, if no frost is forecast.
- To control iris borer, clean up and destroy the old foliage before new growth begins.
- Fertilize bulbs with a "bulb booster" formulation broadcast over the planting beds. Hose off any granules that stick to the foliage.
- Dormant mail order plants should be unwrapped immediately. Keep the roots from drying out, store in a cool protected spot, and plant as soon as conditions allow.
- Loosen winter mulches from perennials cautiously. Re-cover plants at night if frost returns. Clean up beds by removing all weeds and dead foliage at this time.
- Heavy pruning of trees should be complete before growth occurs. Trees should not be pruned while the new leaves are growing.
- Rose bushes affected by black spot last year should be tidied up by removing and burning all leaves from around them. Consider planting more disease resistant varieties.
- Romantic, scent-enriched bowers should be planned now. Many roses, as well as several clematis, are scented and will create leafy and floriferous overhead canopies.
- Trim winter-flowering heathers as soon as their flowers fade. Use hedge shears to clip lightly over them, creating a gently undulating surface.
- Dormant Sprays can be applied to ornamental trees and shrubs now. Do this on a mild day while temperatures are above freezing.
- In warm areas, prune shrubs that flowered late during the previous summer. Pruning now encourages development of shoots that will bear flowers later in the year.
- Clean out rain barrels, especially if leaves have fallen in them. Consider using Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) granules to keep mosquitoes from breeding.

## Lawns

- Grass cutting begins soon. For the first cut, set blades high, gradually reducing their height as the season progresses. Keep blade height at 3-4 inches to reduce the amount of weeds and reduce the need for chemicals.
- If you haven't already sharpened your mower blades, do it now before the mowing season begins.
- Apply controls for wild garlic. It will take several years of annual applications for complete control.
- Repair bed edges, especially where soil has fallen against the lawn.
- Apply broadleaf herbicides now for control of cool-season perennial and annual weeds. These must not be applied to areas that will be seeded soon.

## Miscellaneous

- Late winter storms often bury birds' natural food supplies and a well-stocked feeding station will provide a life-giving haven for our feathered friends.
- Keep your birdfeeders clean to help prevent the spread of diseases. Wipe the perches and ports daily with white vinegar. Here's some great info on how to clean your feeders: <https://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/outdoors/gardening/how-to-clean-a-bird-feeder>
- Encourage birds to nest in your yard by providing water and by putting up bird houses. Planting suitable shrubs, trees, vines, and evergreens will provide wild food sources and nesting habitat.
- Spicebush is blooming in moist woodlands. It is a larval food for Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies.
- Sudden changes in temperature can cause Cotton Wool Disease in pond fish. It looks like a wet cotton ball stuck on the fish. It is easily treated with salt baths or antifungal treatments.

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## Be On The Lookout

- Spray to control lawn weeds such as chickweed and dandelion now when they are growing actively.
- Apply crabgrass preventer between mid-March to mid-April or about the time forsythia is blooming. If you decide to use a weed and feed product, do not



- use a fertilizer high in nitrogen.
- If not already done, remove and dispose of the foliage of plants such as roses, peonies, iris, daylilies, apples, and horse chestnut, which are subject to annual fungal leaf diseases.
- Scout for and remove tent caterpillar egg masses.
- Scout for Spotted Lanternfly egg masses and scrape as many as you can reach to help control populations. Bottom line with SLF: Kill them if you can. Use recommended practices. Don't move them around.
- Apples, pears, and other plants infected with fireblight should have had diseased wood pruned out by the end of February. If this was not completed by then, wait until dry weather in mid-summer. Pruning wounds made at this time of year may provide entry points for the bacteria that caused the disease.
- Don't forget to inspect plants you are overwintering indoors for insects. Insect populations can increase rapidly at this time of year before the plants are set outside for the summer.
- Cool-season grasses are best fertilized in fall. If you do apply fertilizer in spring, make sure it is low in nitrogen. Nitrogen applied in spring encourages excess growth, which is more susceptible to disease.
- Do not apply dormant oil sprays to a plant after its buds have begun to swell as damage may occur.
- Do not work wet soils.

#### **About Lori Metz:**

Lori Metz is the owner of Carriage House Landscape Design. She is a Landscape Designer, and a Horticulturist. She is a great source of information and puts out a monthly newsletter that is very informative. You can sign up for it on her website by accessing [carriagehousedesign.net](http://carriagehousedesign.net) and going to newsletters. Lori is great to have as a speaker. She also holds events periodically on gardening related topics. Her phone number is 484-483-3495. She did a presentation on landscape lighting for the PGC, Parkland Garden Club, that was very informative.