Gardening Tips for March
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Annuals and Perennials

- **Seeds** of annuals that require 10-12 weeks of growth before transplanting can be started indoors now.
- Plant cool-season annuals, such as pansies, snapdragons, and calendulas at the end of the month, weather permitting.
- Some seeds can be sown onto an inch or so of melting snow on a calm day. These include poppy, calendula, evening primrose and lupine. Be sure the area beneath the snow is bare ground.
- Using sterile growing mix for starting seeds reduces problems with damping-off fungi. Avoid overwatering, which encourages root rots.
- Once your garden beds thaw, remove old garden debris such as leaves, stalks, and seed heads to reduce the presence of any overwintering diseases and pests.
- Before new shoots emerge, cut back last year’s stalks on perennials and grasses.
- Divide hosta when shoots appear. Clumps can be dug up, split and replanted.
- Prune old, leggy growth from heather (which flowers on new growth in late summer) but prune heath (which sets its flower buds in late spring) just enough to shape it in the early spring.
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Education and Events

- Sign up for gardening classes or seminars offered by many garden centers or town recreation office or through the [UConn Master Gardener Program](#).
- Visit the greenhouses at [Elizabeth Park](#) in West Hartford to view the tulips and other spring-flowering bulbs.
- Sign up for free [composting webinars](#) in March and April.
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Houseplants

- Prune any houseplants that have gotten leggy to encourage new growth.
- Houseplants may now be fertilized monthly as their growth resumes.
- Pot up begonia and caladium bulbs. Place in a warm, bright location to encourage growth.
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In the Vegetable Garden
Send your vegetable garden soil samples to the UConn Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory for testing. Finish getting your seed and plant orders in by mail or on-line. Seeds of vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and herbs that require 10-12 weeks of growth before transplanting can be started indoors this month. Using sterile growing mix for starting seeds reduces problems with damping-off fungi. Avoid overwatering, which encourages root rots. Seeds of cold weather vegetables like spinach, peas, lettuce and broccoli can be direct seeded as soon as soil is workable. Raised beds are a great alternative when the available soil is poor and this is a good time to construct them. Weed early as unwanted seedlings slip out more easily in moist early-spring soil.

Insects

Clear out open cereal and grain boxes, store in tight-sealed plastic containers, and vacuum the pantry to control pantry pests as part of Spring cleaning. Prune or peel off and destroy Eastern tent caterpillar egg masses. Favorite hosts include cherry, crabapple and apple. Look for the shiny, dark brown egg masses about 1" wide wrapped around small twigs. Inspect bark of cherry, plum and peach for powdery white prunicola scale infestations and plan horticultural oil applications if needed. A brush is sometimes useful for mechanically rubbing the insects off. Check for tan gypsy moth egg masses on tree trunks and branches. Scrape or brush off and destroy if possible. Be on the lookout for spotted lanternfly egg masses and report them to the CT Agricultural Experiment Station.

Landscape and Lawns

Fruits

Prune out and destroy dark, swollen black knot galls on twigs of cherry and plum before budbreak. On trees, shrubs, fruiting bushes and vines, prune off and destroy cankered twigs and any branches showing dieback. Prune shortly before budbreak, or wait until just after leaves have expanded. Fertilize fruit trees, in late March, weather permitting. Thin bramble plantings (raspberries, blackberries, etc.) to increase air circulation and reduce stem and leaf disease problems. Fertilize blueberries before budbreak. Inspect bark of cherry, plum and peach for powdery white prunicola scale infestations and plan horticultural oil applications if needed. A brush is sometimes useful for mechanically rubbing the insects off. Prune or peel off and destroy Eastern tent caterpillar egg masses. Favorite hosts include cherry, crabapple and apple. Look for the shiny, dark brown egg masses about 1" wide wrapped around small twigs.

Lawns

Get your soil tested through the UConn Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory before any major planting or fertilizing venture. Soils sent in before April 1 will avoid the spring rush. Add limestone, fertilizer or organic materials as recommended and incorporate into planting beds if soil is not too wet to work, but don’t fertilize the lawn until mid-April. As ground becomes workable, de-thatch the lawn if you find an inch or more of thatch; seed any bare spots. Compacted soils can be improved by loosening and incorporating 1 to 3 inches of organic matter. Turn the compost pile; if it is too moist add dry materials that are high in carbon such as shredded newspaper, straw or shredded leaves. For easier lawn maintenance, eliminate the hard to mow spaces such as acute angles in beds and borders. Combine single trees or shrubs into a large planting connected with ground cover. Put the bird bath in a flower bed or surround it with ground cover.

Trees and Shrubs
• Soak mail order bare-root plants for about an hour before planting.
• Carefully remove winter mulches from planting beds as snow melts and temperatures warm but leave it nearby so that tender plants may be recovered if there is a frost.
• Check landscape plants for winter damage and prune if necessary after all freezing temps have passed for the season and new growth begins.
• **Horticultural oil** applications at dormant rates are usually applied from late March through early May, depending on plants to be treated and weather conditions.
• Check for tan **gypsy moth** egg masses on tree trunks and branches. Scrape or brush off and destroy if possible.
• Check trunk and rough branch areas of white pines for cottony white flecks of pine bark adelgid. Plan **horticultural oil** treatment if needed.
• **Horticultural oil** treatments for maple bladder gall mite, **spider mites** on evergreens and scale on shrubs and trees can be applied; check labels for specifics on appropriate weather conditions. A brush is sometimes useful for mechanically rubbing the insects off.
• Prune off and destroy brown shoot tips killed by Nantucket pine tip moth on Japanese black, mugo, scots, Austrian and other 2- and 3-needled pines. Damaged tips are brown and hollow in the center from the feeding of the caterpillars.
• Remove and destroy infested foliage on arborvitae, boxwood, and juniper to control leafminer. Look for browned foliage that is hollowed out to detect the problem.
• Move woody plants before they begin new spring growth; transplant as soon as the soil is workable.

**Wildlife**

• Keep any birdseed and pet food that is stored in the garage in tightly covered containers to prevent rodents and wildlife from getting into it.
• **FrogWatch USA** is looking for volunteers to record the number and varieties of frogs around the country.
• Bring bird feeders in once black bears emerge from hibernation.

**Yard Tools and Accessories**

• Start cleaning containers and pots so they are ready for planting.
• Start your lawn mower, check to see if it needs service, and get the blades sharpened.
• Clean and sharpen garden tools. Take an inventory of supplies you will need for the upcoming growing season. Paint handles red or orange to make them more visible on the lawn.
• Save plastic milk jugs or 2-liter containers to use as individual **hot caps or cloches**. They will fit nicely over small garden plants, creating a free miniature greenhouse.

Despite good cultural practices, pests and diseases at times may appear. Chemical control should be used only after all other methods have failed.

For pesticide information please call UConn Home and Garden Education Center weekdays, in Connecticut call toll free 877-486-6271. Out of state call 860-486-6271

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