

**By Barbara Blaha,
Contributing Writer**

The days are getting longer and warmer and the garden is showing signs of life – where do we start to welcome in the spring garden? If you attended the Westonka Horticulture Day on March 27 you gained much advise on the how to's of summer gardening, but what about spring care – what do you do now since you cannot get into the garden just yet.

Remember last fall we said you could leave some things until this spring – well spring has arrived and now is the time to start the cleanup.

Perennial Gardens

- Most perennials can handle a light frost so you can remove mulch from plant beds but keep it near by. Average last frost in the Twin Cities area is mid-May; there is still a chance of a hard freeze. If this should happen, recover the plants with mulch on the night of the suspected frost.
- If perennial leaves are damaged by frost they will return. It is the hard freeze (**Hard Freeze** - A freeze when the air temperature is 26 degrees or colder for at least four consecutive hours. It usually means that seasonal vegetation will be destroyed. http://en.mimi.hu/meteorology/hard_freeze.html) that you must be concerned with.
- Do not walk on garden soil until it is dry – dig down a couple of inches – if wet, stay off the soil, soil compaction will result in poor performing plants
- Those plants that didn't get cut down last fall can now be taken care of. Now is the time to cut down old ornamental grasses before the new growth gets too tall.
- Also clean up all the dead leaves that you didn't have time to clean up last fall, hosta, lilies, lupines, sedums etc. (note about sedums, especially autumn joy – if you have deer who eat these plants, leave the old stems standing until the plants are close to bloom in the fall. The deer will poke those noses on the stems and it will deter them from eating the sedum – a little unsightly but worth it for the blooms in the fall)
- For winter hardy mums leaves the old stems on for about another month, until you see new growth reappear – this will help mark where they are located. Plus, mums tend to emerge late and you don't want to forget where they are planted.
- Pull out dead annuals that you left for reseeding.
- Check for emerging bulbs that you planted last fall.
- Leaves removed from the garden beds can be mulched with a lawn mower and placed as mulch around plants once the soil has warmed. Don't place around plants if the soil is still cool, it will take longer for the plants to get going with cold feet.
- Extra leaves can be tilled into the vegetable garden before planting or share with friends and neighbors. If you need to send leaves to the community compost pile, it is now law that the new bio-degradable lawn bags must be used.
- Now is the time to split perennials, lilies, lady's mantel, hardy geraniums, campanula, monarda, astilbe and other summer perennials. Do not split fall plants such as Peonies (September), wood anemone, brunnera, lily of valley, Virginia bluebells, epimedium, nepeta, and oriental poppy.

- Split perennials and other plants that are no longer needed can be shared at the Westonka Horticultural Society Plant Swap on May 22.

Annuals

- Cool season annual Pansies are a perfect way to bring color before the warm season annuals can be planted. Place in pots outside your door or on the sidewalks.
- Do not plant warm season annuals until after May 20 or after the soil has warmed, Memorial Day weekend is always a good time to start in ground planting
- If you choose to plant warm season annuals now the plants will be slow to start because of the cold soil. Also, plan to cover any warm season annuals when temperatures fall below 40 degrees at night through April.
- Cool season vegetable seeds can be planted now which include lettuce, potatoes, radishes, peas, and rocket
- Make a salad bowl by planting several different lettuces in a large pot, keep in a sunny location and water

Trees, Shrubs and Roses

- The mulch should have been removed from Tea Roses by now if you used the Minnesota tip method. Slowly start to remove the soil and lift the roses approximately April 19. If you piled soil and leaves around your roses, start to remove this material. For information on the Minnesota tip - <http://www.extension.umn.edu/yardandgarden/ygbriefs/h112rose-mntip.html>
- If you use rose cones remove them now and over the course of a week or so remove the insulating material.
- Old fashion rose bushes should not be pruned until new growth appears. Most return on old wood.
- Tips for pruning roses <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg1105.html>
- Selecting hardy roses for northern gardens <http://www.entomology.umn.edu/cues/extpubs/6750roses/DG6750.html>
- Now is a good time to start searching quality nurseries for trees and shrubs. To learn how to plant trees and shrubs properly <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg3825.html>
- Attend a workshop on Emerald Ash Borer and Japanese Beetle – both invasive species, so you can identify should they show up in your yard.
- Don't cut down ash trees just because you think it will be infested. Wait.
- During dry weather water, water, water your trees. The investment is too great to have a loss.
- Only trim trees and shrubs during their proper pruning time to avoid stress and infestation of other bugs. For the how to <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/DG0628.html>
- Trim blooming shrubs such as lilac and magnolia after blooming. This will encourage a fuller and thicker bloom the following year.
- Another great source for tree and shrub trimming is at <http://www.mntrees.org/treecare.cfm>

Maintenance

- During dry spells keep watering all new trees and shrubs, water deep, at least 1 inch per week
- Check outside water spigots and hoses for leaks
- Pull out all statuary and clay pots and check for cracks

- If clay pots are cracked or broken, don't throw them away, be creative. Tuck them under plants on their side in the garden making it look like a plant is tipped and spilling from the side
- Use broken pieces as drainage in the bottom of other pots
- Check all water pump connections and test water temps before placing fish and plants in the water
- Bring out the patio table, chairs, and cushions, they should all be ready to go if cleaned last fall
- Clean and rinse out all sprayers from previous pesticides
- Protect your plants from deer grazing by using a commercial deer deterrent or make your own – 3 eggs blended in a cup of water and add to one gallon of water in a sprayer. Spray all plants that deer eat. There is no odor to humans but the deer can smell it and will not eat plants that have been sprayed. Re-spray after rain. Remaining “deer juice” can be kept in a clearly marked container in the refrigerator – do not leave stored in the garage or other warm locations.
- Remove all burlap or guards from trees and shrubs

Lawn

- Do not rake the lawn if it is moist and wet
- Stay off lawns until dry to avoid soil compaction – grass will perform poorly if soil is compacted
- Pre-emergence herbicides affect germinating seeds. To be effective, the herbicide should be applied two to three weeks before weed seeds germinate. Consequently, pre-emergence herbicides are most effective against annual weeds. For control of summer annuals such as crabgrass, application of pre-emergence herbicides between May 5 and May 20 in the Twin Cities area is most effective in a normal year.
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/DG1137.html>
- For more information about lawn care
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/extensionnews/2009/early-spring-lawn.html>

Education

- Learn all you can about sustainable and responsible gardening and landscaping so your garden work is not more work but an enjoyable past time.
- Attend garden and landscape seminars at reputable nurseries or the Minnesota State Horticultural Society <http://northerngardener.org/>
- Visit a Master Gardener Answer booth where available
- Visit the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum for display gardens and see how plants look, feel, smell and perform in Minnesota <http://www.arboretum.umn.edu/>
- For more information about gardening and landscaping, visit the University of Minnesota Extension site at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/gardeninfo/> or <http://www.extension.umn.edu/>

Blaha is the executive director of the Westonka Horticultural Society and society members provided this information. Learn more about the Westonka Horticultural Society at www.westonkahort.org or email westonkahortday@gmail.com.

Westonka Horticultural Society Plant Swap

Members of the Westonka Horticulture Society will host a plant swap on Saturday, May 22. Bring plants to share or if you don't have plants, come and take plants for your garden. The plant swap is \$5 for non-members of the Westonka Horticultural Society and free to members. Other garden related items available include tools, house plants, garden books, etc. All plants should be in individual containers of some sort such as pots or plastic bags. Plants should be clearly labeled with plant name, color and approximate size. Start watching your garden now for plants that will need to be divided or need to be replaced. Coming in May – check the Westonka Horticultural Society website for proper “Swap Etiquette” and additional details.