



MARCH IN THE GARDEN

Sources: Texas Garden Almanac by Dr. Doug Welsh, Professor & Horticulturist/Texas A&M University, Fort Bend County Master Gardeners, Inc. (www.fbmng.com) and A Garden Book for Houston and the Texas Gulf Coast by Lynn M. Herbert and the River Oaks Garden Club.

Garden Tasks



*Get out that fertilizer and give your annual and perennial flowers a good feeding. Don't fertilize azaleas or camellias until after blooming.

*Now is the time to divide clumps or remove the old growth from perennials that are beginning to pop up. Take care not to damage new growth that is appearing.

*If you plan to do lots of planting this month, plan to do lots of soil preparation with an addition of some good organic matter to your beds. Add mulch to your flower beds to conserve moisture and prevent pesky weeds from sprouting. However, don't be too anxious to mulch your new vegetable plantings. Mulch keeps the sun from warming the soil which is important in promoting plant growth. However, newly planted vegetables do not like cold nights, so plan to cover your beds. Mulch can be put down by the end of the month when plants are well established.

*Repeat after me, "Don't turn the sprinklers on. Don't turn the sprinklers on." Spring rains have built up soil moisture enough to hold off turning the irrigation system on until April. If you must water, turn your system on manually once or twice.



What to Plant

*You still have time to plant those fall-blooming bulbs. The same is true for summer-blooming bulbs and rhizomes.

*Let the planting begin! Time for warm-season annuals and perennials. You should consider the planting area carefully and choose plants with suitable sun and soil requirements. Some good suggestions for annuals and perennials grown in our area are: petunias (especially the Laura Bush and Wave varieties), bacopa, calibrachoa, coreopsis, zinnias, nicotiana (flowering tobacco), sunflowers, bat-faced cuphea, begonias, tithonia, salvias, copper canyon daisy, bulbine, coneflower, rudbeckia, shrimp plant, Turk's cap, lantana, Mexican mint marigold and plumbago.

*March is pretty much your last opportunity to plant any trees, shrubs and woody vines that didn't get planted in fall or winter. Some nice choices might be althea (rose of Sharon), butterfly bush, crepe myrtle, glossy abelia and vitex (chaste tree).

*This is a busy month in the vegetable garden. Before planting, prepare your beds with organic matter.

*If not already in, tomato transplants should be planted now. They may still need some protection on frosty nights. If you plan to use your tomatoes for daily eating (salads, sandwiches, cooking) choose an indeterminate variety that continues to produce fruit over a period of time. If you plan to use your tomatoes for making and preserving salsa, tomato sauce or diced tomatoes, choose a determinate variety that produces fruit all at one time.

*The following vegetables can be planted from seed this month: beans (bush and pole from mid-March on), cantaloupe, corn, peppers (transplants), summer squash and watermelon

*Are you running out of space in your garden? Try some companion planting with your vegetables. A few that work well together are corn, summer squash and pole beans (known as the three sisters by the Native Americans), okra and eggplant or peas and carrots. A useful chart of companion plants can be found at www.howtogardenadvice.com/garden_info/companion_planting_chart. The chart also includes companion plantings for herbs and flowers.

*Warm-season herbs that can be planted this month include basil, mint, chives, lemon grass, lemon verbena, oregano, rosemary, and thyme.