

The Garden in March

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturalist

Yup. It's still cold and it's still gray. As I write this, a stiff wind is blowing icy cold and the clouds are marching in as though to permanently occupy the sky. But, as I observe my garden from the cozy comfort of my living room chair, I see signs of spring all around. Crocus and Iris reticulata have been blooming for a week now, and the daffodils are up, perky and budded. The birds have begun to return and their song is already cheering the bleary mornings. Yup. The days are mostly still painfully gray, but I know, just as all gardeners know, that the days are lengthening, buds are swelling, and spring is on its merry way.

In the ornamental garden:

- If you haven't already ventured out to remove the old stalks of perennials, then on the next goodish day make time to do so. This very simple task really helps to banish the bare wintery look and give a sense of tidiness and a good fresh start to the season. Think of it as spring cleaning for the garden.
- On the subject of spring cleaning, pull any weeds that have had the audacity to grow and thrive over the winter. Some weeds (especially the ones I call pop-weeds because of the seeds' ability to pop explosively throughout the garden-and into your eyes if your hovering nearby) have no problem growing through the winter. Also, dandelions are already showing up with tight little flower buds nestled in the crown. Oh boy. Weeding season. Yea.
- Fertilize Rhododendrons, especially if they're fairly new to your garden. Use a specific rhododendron/azalea fertilizer which helps to provide the right PH level. If you know your soil is acidic or slightly so already, then an all purpose slow release fertilizer is just fine. If you don't know the PH level of your soil where your rhodies are planted, then test your soil. The Nursery carries an easy to use test kit, or you could send a soil sample to a lab to have a complete analysis. Generally, with rhododendrons you want to fertilize in early spring when the flower buds begin to swell, and again at leaf emergence-usually late May early June depending on the variety. Not sure how to identify a flower bud vs. a leaf bud? A flower bud is big and fat and full of flowery potential. A leaf bud is slim and narrow, full of...leafy potential. Or, you could ask one of us at the Nursery to show you the difference.
- March is the last call for bare root trees, shrubs, and berries. At the beginning of April we pot them all up and the prices go up, so seize the day and buy bare root in March!
- Wrap up your fruit tree and rose pruning.
- Shear your hedge. If you've got a row of yew or boxwood or emerald greens planted as a hedge, now is a great time to prune or shear them to keep their dense uniformity.

- Our spring bulbs are in at the Nursery. That means dahlias, lilies, gladiolas, begonias, and more! We also have organic seed potatoes, garlic, and shallots.
- There are a few tough annuals that can be directly sown into the garden, such as calendula, sweet alyssum, breadseed poppies, larkspur, love-in-a-mist, and sweet peas. Don't forget the sweet peas!

In the veggie garden:

- Remove straw mulch from asparagus and garlic. Look for the beginnings of asparagus spears and the tips of garlic. At this point, the straw will only harbor slugs and snails, which nobody needs.
- Prune and thin out unproductive raspberry canes.
- Sow peas and other cool crop veggies if you haven't already done so. Plants like radish, arugula, parsley, cilantro, spinach, kale, and swiss chard can all be sown directly into the garden in March.
- Plant potatoes. St. Patrick's day is a good general rule of thumb for us in the Pacific Northwest.
- Sow seed indoors for tomatoes and peppers. With supplemental heat and light, they'll be ready to plant out in May assuming the weather is good.

There's an awful lot to be excited about this time of year and the anticipation is perhaps the most delicious part of it all. I find myself taking slow walks around the garden, looking for points of new growth on herbaceous perennials and swelling flower buds on shrubs and trees, looking most of all for the signs that tell me that a new emergence is happening and that a new season is upon us.



About the author:

Rachel has been gardening since childhood, thanks to her mom, and has been part of the team at Christianson's since 2002. She's a Certified Professional Horticulturist with a passion for roses and vegetable gardening. Rachel and her family enjoy gardening together and now share their urban garden with a menagerie of ducks, chickens, two cats, and a dog.

*This article was first published in the March 2013 issue of **Garden Notes**, our monthly online newsletter. You can sign up for Garden Notes on the Newsletter page of our website (www.christiansonnursery.com) or sign up in person the next time you're in the Garden Store at the Nursery.*