Gardening Calendar

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February Gardening Calendar

February is the main pruning month. If we ever receive any hard freezes, it will be time to cut back the freeze-killed tops of esperanza, poinciana, firebush, salvia, lantana, and other root hardy sub-tropical plants.

Roses bloom on the year’s new growth. They are pruned to remove dead and crossing wood and to open up the middle to air and light and to stimulate new growth. . Three or four main stems arising above the graft are selected to provide the basic frame. They should be spaced around the center of the plant and extend at as close to 60 degrees as possible from the base of their origin.

Peaches bloom on last year’s wood but if left to their own devices produce excess numbers of small fruit. Pruning should remove some of the excess wood so the remaining fruit producing wood has access to light and air movement. Like roses, the basic structure is an open middle bordered by 3 or 4 main branches extending at approximately 60 degrees from the central trunk.

Visit plantanswers.com for instructions and diagrams to assist you in pruning roses, fruit trees, hedges, and other woody plants.

Remember if you prune oaks, paint all wounds immediately after they are cut to prevent oak wilt infection. Firewood from oak wilt killed red oaks can be a source of oak wilt fungal spores. Use up all the new firewood you obtained this winter unless you know it is not oak wilt killed red oak. For more information on the symptoms, prevention, causes and treatment of oak wilt visit the Texas Forest Service Oak Wilt Website.

It is too early to fertilize the lawn but it is a good time to aerate and top dress the grass. The activity reduces compaction, and allows moisture and oxygen to move to the roots. Rent one of the aerators that cuts out a plug of sod and places it on the lawn surface like a cigar butt. If you follow up the aeration with a top dressing of one-half inch of compost, the organic material will filter into the aeration channels to bring it into the root system.

I prefer compost to a product that hort suppliers call “top dressing.” Top dressing includes sand which is a filler material. The compost is the active ingredient. If you are unable to aerate and top dress your lawn yourself, consider hiring a lawn company to do it. The lawn benefits greatly.

Late in the month consider applying a pre-emergent herbicide if you had trouble with sandburs or crabgrass last year.

In the flower garden the cool weather flowers should perform well through April. Irrigate them as needed and provide a light application of lawn fertilizer (1 cup/100 sq. ft. every month. If you have primula, strawberries or other low-growing plants, replenish the slug and snail bait every 3 weeks. February is a good time to plant petunias and geraniums in containers. Bluebonnet transplants can still be planted in the garden, in containers or as the beginning of a naturalized patch.

Apply dormant oil to fruit trees to control scale and other wintering insects. Make the application when 2 days of temperatures above 45 degrees are forecast. Follow label instructions.

It is a good time to plant shade trees, fruit trees, and shrubs. Water them generously in at planting and cover the root system with mulch on the soil surface. The mulch conserves water and also makes it unnecessary to string-mow around the trunk. String mowing of grass at the trunk results in many trees being girdled.

In the vegetable garden plant potatoes and other cool weather vegetables.

For potatoes start by digging trenches 1 foot deep in the raised bed. Pile the soil on the side of the trench. Obtain seed potatoes from your favorite nursery. I have best production results from red potatoes but both red and whites are available. Cut the potatoes in pieces at least 2inches square with at least one eye on each piece. Small potatoes can be planted whole. Place the pieces of the potato in the trench with 2 feet between each piece. Cover the pieces to a depth of two inches in the trench and then add the rest of the soil in weekly additions as the stem emerges from the soil. Add the soil but leave the top of the stem uncovered.

Begin digging the potatoes as you need them after the first blooms appear on the plant. Dig up the potatoes from the remaining plants when the foliage dies and browns.

Early February is also the time to plant onions, broccoli, cabbage, collards, and chard transplants. Brussels sprouts and cauliflower usually do not have enough time before hot weather arrives to produce a crop. Plant carrot, lettuce, beet, English pea, and turnip and radish seed.