

Get an Early Start on Springtime Chores

By Susan Camp

The first daffodils are waking up and showing us their pretty yellow, white, and pink faces, and if you look very closely, you will see tiny buds on certain deciduous trees that have been sleeping through the winter.

Like me, you may be a little cautious about pruning and planting too early, although I know some brave souls who have already begun to march forward (pun intended) with early springtime gardening tasks. I'm not saying that I know better than other gardeners, but I remember some substantial snowstorms in past Februarys, so I am tackling spring clean-up at a moderate pace.

If you aren't ready to dive into pruning and setting out new plants, but you want to enjoy the pleasant days outdoors, look around your property for other chores you can accomplish now that might get pushed aside in a few weeks.

I mentioned several weeks ago that we had removed our granddaughter's old playhouse, which sat nestled under some mature trees next to the garage. Jim and I decided to build a small terrace on the playhouse site. We have plenty of old bricks left over from other projects, and the terrace will add a pleasant, shady spot to rest when we are working in the field.

It's time to paint the post that holds our and our neighbor's house signs and replace the directional signs for both houses. Once the temperature reaches between 55 to 60 °F, we can begin the little painting jobs that always spruce up the property. Mailbox posts and decorative gateposts look bright and cheerful with a new coat of paint.

A warm, late winter day is a good time to repair or replace broken fence posts and rails, mend grape or rose arbors, and reset paving stones that border a driveway, parking area, or flower bed.

If you have woods, as we have, it is easier to see which dead or diseased trees need to be removed when the branches are bare of leaves. Hauling the debris out of the woods is less of a chore, too. Unwanted English ivy, vinca, and other invasive species are easier to remove in winter when those plants are dormant. During the cold months, fewer ticks, chiggers, and mosquitoes are active to pester us, although I found a tick on my neck while working outside last week, so remember that ticks are with us year-round.

Take stock of garden ornaments and furniture. Which pieces will be serviceable if sanded and repainted, and which ones are beyond repair? It may be time to buy new Adirondack chairs and begin sanding and repainting metal furniture. Your garden gnome may have served you well, but perhaps he should be retired this spring.

Winter is a good time to de-clutter the potting shed. Clean and repair tools; sand and paint handles and sharpen blades. Throw away broken tools, pots, and assorted junk that tends to

collect on the shelves. Does the potting shed door need a fresh coat of paint, and could it use a new door?

Check expiration dates on garden pesticides and fertilizers. Set aside old or unused chemicals for disposal on the next hazardous material disposal day. The next Gloucester Household Harmful Waste Collection is scheduled for Saturday, April 15th from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Hayes Convenience Center at 7599 Guinea Road. If you are like us that day usually sneaks up before we are ready. If you separate the chemicals in advance, dropping them off at the collection center will be a simple task.

Sometimes gardening is hard, dirty work that seems never-ending. We don't always reap the hoped-for rewards, and we dread the chores that seem like drudgery. If we complete some of the clean-up and repair jobs on pleasant winter days, we can focus on our plans for spring planting during the frigid, snowy ones, with plenty of time to drink tea and binge-watch favorite programs.

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