

Around the Yard

by Reeve Hobbie, Master Gardener

It's 2020 and I have the "perfect vision" for your yard and mine too. Even though it is winter there are plenty of things one can do on those warm days to get your yard ready for spring.

This year I would like to share some ideas you can apply month by month in a "Dos and Don'ts" approach. Other gardening articles by topic appear in the Around the Yard Archives.

JANUARY

Do...

- prune trees if you believe it's even necessary. Hiring someone? Be sure you select a certified arborist that knows what he or she is doing (list available by calling Travis County Master Gardeners). They'll sterilize tools, prune properly, and seal all cuts appropriately.
- remove mistletoe (a parasite) and ball moss (an epiphyte) from your trees. Even though the latter does not take nutrients from your tree, like mistletoe does, ball moss can smother the foliage and eventually kill your tree.
- remove only the old seed heads from crape myrtles just using small clippers.
- prepare soil for new garden beds or those needing rejuvenation. Add compost and other nutrients and work into soil. It's more important to feed soil now than to try to feed plants later.
- repair and sharpen tools and lawn mowers now rather than wait for the spring rush.
- rake or blow fall leaves off the lawn to help prevent spring lawn diseases.
- plant new trees and shrubs now to give them a good start before it gets too hot.
- apply fertilizer to winter annuals. They need a boost right about now.
- transplant trees and shrubs you intend to move to another part of your yard while they are dormant.
- consider irrigating your lawn and gardens before an anticipated hard freeze. Water acts as insulation.

Don't...

- commit "crape murder" while pruning your crapes this month. Only cut branches back to the size of your pinky finger. There should be no reason to bring out loppers or tree saws, just your hand clippers. You simply can't create a 6 foot crape out of a wannabe 20 footer.
- fertilize your lawn. It's far too early. You should wait until April.
- remove what appear to be dead perennials or shrubs. Despite a harsh winter please be patient for spring to come before deciding on the fate of your plants.

- rake or blow leaves into the street. It's prohibited by City ordinance.

FEBRUARY

Do...

- eradicate weeds in your lawn before they emerge. Early February is when you can apply a pre-emergent weed killer (must be without fertilizer) and expect results. Or hand pull easy-to-spot culprits, the ones already greening up, as this is also a great way to get your lawn and gardens cleaned up.
- major pruning and thinning of rose bushes, cutting back by as much as half, on or before Valentine's Day.
- plant new rose bushes this month. Good month for transplanting older roses too.
- cut back overgrown or ratty looking ground cover to include Asiatic jasmine, liriope, ferns, cast iron plant.
- continue to be patient with perennials as it still may be too early to tell if they survived the winter cold.
- fertilize and prune fruit and nut trees.
- prune evergreen shrubs just before they begin to push out new spring growth.

Don't...

- prune oaks of any kind. PERIOD! After January 31 you are flirting with oak wilt. The fungus is active and could kill your trees if trimmed anytime between February 1 and July 1. When the summer heat is beginning to peak the fungus is dormant.
- apply lawn fertilizer to your grass this month. You still need to wait until your lawn greens up naturally and you have mowed it at least two times. Think April 15, Income Tax Filing Day. That's when you may apply fertilizer.
- remove leaf litter or extra mulch in gardens just yet as plants still need that extra protection for a few more weeks. (Last average freeze for our area is late February.)

More "dos and don'ts" will be published for the months of March and April, so watch for the next article. If you have questions about your yard or garden, please call Travis County Master Gardeners at 512-854-9600. The person at the other end of the line may not have an immediate answer, but they'll research it and will get back with you.
