

## HOME GARDENING NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY (Hampton Roads Area, VA)

Get those cob webs and rust off your tools and get outside ... OK, it's still may be a bit cold out there so you have another month before you 'really' need to get to work. There are quite a few shrubs that need to be pruned hard this month so you can really enjoy the blooms later this spring or summer. Take advantage of the many free pruning classes in your area. February is a great time to order plants and to start seeds indoor so your plants will be ready to plant outside once the last frost has occurred. Yes, it's even time to get some vegetable seeds into the ground. Contact your local extension office for a "free" vegetable planting guide. It's never too late to plant bulbs ... they may not bloom on a normal schedule the 1<sup>st</sup> year, but if they are viable (solid and not mushy) then they should do fine. For free bulb see the Beauty by the Bulb notice for February 2. On average this month, it will be a high of 50 degrees and a low of 32 degrees and Hampton Roads will get 10 days of rain averaging 3.47 inches.

**Cool Season Grasses (Fescue, Bluegrass, and Ryegrass):** Do nothing. If you fertilized properly your lawns should be 'relatively' green. Cut as necessary. Service your lawnmower and sharpen the blade (now is a good time as most service centers are still in a winter lull before the spring rush to service lawn mowers).

**Warm Season Grasses (Bermuda, Centipede, Zoysia, and St. Augustine):** Do nothing. Your lawn should be brown (unless you overseeded with an annual Rye grass). Service your lawnmower and sharpen the blade.

**Crab Grass Control:** To control Crabgrass you need to apply 'pre-emergent' products, chemical or organic. These pre-emergents work on the seed and won't allow them to germinate. These products typically will not control already existing crabgrass. There are many crabgrass control chemicals and only a few are safe for 'all' lawns. Not all pre-emergents work on Annual Blue Grass (*poa annua*). Read the label carefully, or call your local extension agent/Master Gardener Office for other recommendations. Below is the latest table of pre and post emergent herbicides to control unwanted grasses in your lawn. Applying crabgrass control too late is a waste of money and damages the environment. There are several products out there for 'Pre-Emergent' Crab Grass control. The chemicals last 2 - 6 months depending on product, so you will have to apply crabgrass controls several times over the growing season. Apply crabgrass 'Pre-emergent' controls early but before the forthysias bloom (or mid March), and then reapply according to your products label. Crab grass starts germinating and growing when the soil temperature reaches 60°. Annual Blue grass pre-emergent treatment can be 1<sup>st</sup> applied in November or December as this grass can survive mild winters.

According to a Cornell University study, a good 'organic' pre-emergent is corn gluten meal. Not only does this inhibit new seed growth for up to two months but it also lightly feeds the lawn. Virginia Tech has not studied this but a report from Cornell University showed promising results.

There are several new products now available to the public that can be used after germinations but the effectiveness is limited based upon the number of tillers (blade/braches) of the crabgrass.

Application timing is critical for success in using these expensive products. The best home crabgrass eradication is to dig and remove the plant and overseed the area. A healthy, properly fertilized, and watered lawn will prevent weeds and crabgrass from growing in your yard.

Below is the Virginia Pest Management Guide 2005 Edition recommendation for chemical control of annual grasses.

Annual Grass Control with Preemergence and Postemergence Turfgrass Herbicides <sup>1</sup>						
Herbicide	Crabgrass	Goosegrass	Annual bluegrass	Foxtail	Sandbur	No. of treatments annually <sup>2</sup>
<b>Preemergent</b>						
Benfen	S	I	I	S	I	2
Bensulide	S	R	S	S	—	1-2
DCPA	S	I	I	S	I	2
Dithiopyr	S	I	I	S	—	1
Oryzalin	S	I	S-I	S	S-I	2
Benfen + oryzalin	S	I	S-I	S	S-I	1
Oxadiazon	S	S	I	S	I	1
Bensulide + oxadiazon	S	S	S	S	I	2
Pendimethalin	S	I	I	S	I	2
Prodiamine	S	I	I	S	—	1
Benfen + trifluralin	S	I	S-I	S	S-I	2
Siduron	S	R	R	S	—	2
<b>Postemergent</b>						
Dithiopyr	S	I	I-R	S	—	1
DSMA, MSMA	S	I-R	R	S	I	2-6
Fenoxaprop	S	I	I-R	S	—	2
Dithiopyr + MSMA	S	I	I-R	S	—	1
Dithiopyr + fenoxaprop	S	S-I	I-R	S	—	1

<sup>1</sup> S=weed susceptibility; I=intermediate tolerance, good control at times with high rates, sometimes poor, may require more treatments per year; R=resistant in most instances, poor control usually less than 70%.

<sup>2</sup> Annual treatment requirement to give listed performance rating. Lower label rates require additional applications.

**General Gardening Tips for this month:**

- **ROSES:** After February 14<sup>th</sup> (Valentines Day) but before mid March, you need to prune your roses. Remove all dead and old canes. Small twiggy growth should be removed from the center of the shrub. If there are many canes, they should be reduced to 5 or 6 of the strongest and newest canes. If you have only 3 or 4 health canes, that is sufficient to get a bush off to a new start for the new season. Canes should be shortened to 15 to 24 inches. The larger the diameter of the cane the longer you can leave the cane. Make sure the pith (interior) if the

cane is white or a greenish white. If on the first cut, you find the pith of the cane to be dark or tan continue to cut back to the next node. Cut just above a node and at a 30 to 45 degree angle pointing outward. Don't let the bush intimidate you and don't be afraid you will harm it if you cut it back aggressively. Rose bushes thrive on being pruned and this process stimulates new growth. Around mid March, you will need to start applying a high nitrogen (36-6-6) water-soluble solution. Spring blooming climbers should not be pruned until they have finished blooming.

- **CREPE MYRTLE:** Ideal to trim Jan-Mar. Although some people like to top these hearty shrubs, commonly referred to as "Crepe Myrder", this is not a recommended pruning technique. When you top these plants you cause the plant to generate weak branches leading to stubby knots on the end of the branches. They can split and severely damage the plant.
  - Just trim and shape Crepe Myrtles. Remove old seedpods and crossing branches. Remove many of the interior branches to allow new growth and flowers a place to grow. Remove new growth at base of shrub often. This will promote better flowering later. Flowers grow on NEW growth. Water, fertilize, and remove dead blossoms until mid-August for almost continuous summer bloom.
  - For proper pruning techniques click on or paste the following site to your web browser: [http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce/programareas/hort/crape\\_myrtle\\_pruning.htm](http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce/programareas/hort/crape_myrtle_pruning.htm)
- **BUTTERFLY BUSHES and ROSE OF SHARON:** The time to trim is now. You can hard prune these bushes anytime now through March, but the best time to trim them is after mid February. Only disbud or lightly trim to shape after March. Cut bushes 18 inches to waist high above the ground. Flowers grow on NEW growth. After blooms fade, prune off old flowers and new blooms will emerge. You can do this until August. The butterflies will love you for this.
- Don't remove mulch from perennials too early. A warm day may make you think spring is almost here, but there may be more cold weather yet to come. Watch for signs of growth in early spring bulbs. When foliage is 1 inch high, gradually start removing mulch. Cloudy days are best for the initial exposure of the leaves to strong sunlight which can burn tender foliage.
- If you do get early growth and see bulbs that break the surface (which is very common this year) just re-mulch to protect the foliage.
- Ageratum, begonia, marigold, and petunia seeds can be started indoors now. Sprinkle the small seeds sparingly onto moist soil and gently press them in. Start slow-developing flowers such as alyssum, coleus, dusty miller, geranium, impatiens, marigold, petunia, phlox, portulaca, salvia, vinca, and verbena.
- Order perennial plants and bulbs now for cut flowers this summer. Particularly good choices are phlox, daisy, dahlia, cosmos, aster, gladiolus, and lily.
- Check stored bulbs, tubers, and corms. Discard any that are soft or diseased.
- If you are planning to add shade trees to your landscape, here are a few things you should know. Some types of trees have roots that may invade drain fields, crack walks, and pierce foundation walls, so plan the placement and species of the trees to avoid problems. For instance, poplar and ash are known for cracking walls, and should never be planted near houses or walls. Keep these species at the perimeter of the yard. Maple roots can raise heavy concrete sidewalks, and willow and crabapple trees can invade drainage fields with their fibrous roots.

- Branches of forsythia, pussy willow, quince, spirea, and dogwood can be forced for indoor bloom. Make long, slanted cuts when collecting the branches and place the stems in a vase of water. Change the water frequently. They should bloom in about three weeks.
- Prune most shrubs and trees on warm days this month after the coldest weather is past in your area. In the cooler mountain areas of Virginia, wait until late February. Wait until after bloom to prune your spring-flowering shrubs in order to get maximum blossoms.
- Late winter is the time to prune many deciduous trees. Look over your plants now and remove dead, dying, unsightly parts of the tree, sprouts growing at or near the base of the tree trunk, crossed branches, and V-shaped crotches.
- If the soil dries out against a house under the eaves where rain rarely reaches, water well during a winter thaw to prevent loss of plants. Remember that plants require water during the winter to replace water lost due to wind desiccation and lack of rain or snow.
- If bird feeding has been a favorite activity this winter, plant trees and shrubs that provides cover and small fruits for your feathered friends. Consider species such as crabapple, hawthorn, holly, dogwood, and pyracantha that can help lure hungry birds from cultivated fruits, if planted on the opposite side of the yard.
- Keep a bucket with sand and a light oil mixture nearby your gardening tools. After cleaning the tools stick them in the mixture to prevent them from rusting.

### **Herb Tips for this month:**

- Thyme, a low-growing, woody perennial herb, should be started from seed every two to three years because older plants produce coarser, lower grade stems and leaves. Thyme seeds often germinate poorly when planted directly in the soil, so it is advisable to start plants indoors and transplant later.
- If fungus develops on your potted herbs, cut them back to encourage healthy new growth.
- Start herb seeds now in your own mini-greenhouse made from a plastic soda bottle or milk carton. When using a plastic soda bottle, cut off the top two-thirds and fill the bottom third with rooting medium. Make several short cuts around the perimeter, and plant the herb seeds. Put the top back on, using the cuts to lock it into place. When using a milk carton, you also need a plastic bag and a wire coat hanger or other stout wire. Staple the carton shut and cut away one side. Lay the carton on its side, fill with potting media, plant seeds, and add water. Cut the wire into 8-inch lengths, and bend into arches. Place three or four wire arches in the carton so that as the seedlings grow they will not touch the plastic. Place the carton in the plastic bag and seal. Keep your mini-greenhouse in a warm, bright location out of direct sunlight. Open the bag or bottle top daily to check on seedlings. Add water when necessary.
- After a long winter inside (usually with less-than-sufficient sunlight), scented geraniums (yes, this is an herb) often get leggy. Now is the time to cut them back to encourage shorter, fuller growth. The trimmings can even be dried and added to pot of water on a woodstove as a potpourri.

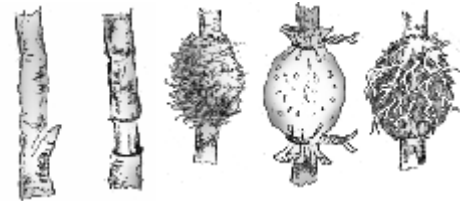
### **Interior Gardening tips for this month:**

- An interesting indoor fern to try is the brake fern, *Pteris cretica*. It grows better in a sunny window than most ferns.

- Resume a fertilizer schedule for indoor plants. Never fertilize a plant in dry soil. Remember that fertilizer is a salt could burn roots, so water your plants thoroughly. It's better to water plants a couple of hours before fertilizing.
- Once a month, water your acid-loving house plants, such as gardenia and citrus, using a solution of 1 teaspoon of vinegar to 1 quart of water.
- When placing plants around the home, remember as a general rule, plants with thick leaves can take lower light levels than those with thin leaves. Check all five growing factors if your houseplants are not growing well. Light, temperature, nutrients, moisture, and humidity must be favorable to provide good growth.
- Amaryllis bulbs may not bloom if they are in too large a pot. There should be no more than one inch of space on each side of the bulb. At least one third of the bulb should be above the soil line.
- Late February is a good time to air-layer such houseplants as dracaena, dieffenbachia, and rubber plant, especially if they have grown too tall and leggy.
- Air-laying is also good way to propagate many woody plants (indoor and outdoor). Contact your local extension agent if in doubt if your specific woody plant can be air-layered.

### **Air layering**

Air layering is used to propagate some indoor (and outdoor) plants with thick stems, or to rejuvenate them when they become leggy. Slit the stem just below a node. Pry the slit open with a toothpick. Surround the wound with wet unmilled sphagnum moss. Wrap plastic or foil around the sphagnum moss and tie in place. When roots pervade the moss (3-6 months), cut the plant off below the root ball. Plant the root ball and the top of the old plant in a new planter. You can let the bottom part of the plant stay where it's at and get new shoots side shoots.



### **Fruits and Vegetable Gardening Tips for this month:**

- A frequently overlooked factor in vegetable garden planning is the date of the family vacation. Choose planting dates and varieties carefully, so your garden won't be ready for a full harvest when you are out of town.
- Don't start your vegetable plants indoors too early. Six weeks ahead of the expected planting date is early enough for the fast-growth species such as cabbage. Eight weeks allows enough time for the slower-growing types such as peppers.
- Early varieties of onions are most productive when grown from transplants (small plants) or from sets (small, onion bulbs grown from seed the previous season). Direct seeding is satisfactory for growing green onions or for late varieties.
- Don't throw out leek roots -- replant them. In just 60 to 90 days, you'll harvest a second bunch of long, thick stalks just as tasty and tender as the first ones. You can even use roots of leeks bought at the grocery store, giving you, in effect, two leeks for the price of one.
- Before working an area in the garden for early spring planting, check the soil. It should be dry enough to crumble in your hand before you work it. The temperature of the soil should be at least 50 to 60 degrees before adding new seeds or plants.

- Gardening in a raised bed improves drainage and gives an earlier start in areas with cold, wet soil.
- This year plan to grow at least one new vegetable that you've never grown before; it may be better than what you are already growing. The new dwarf varieties on the market use less space while producing more food per square foot.
- When planning your vegetable gardens add a few extra plants just in case a few of them succumb to some disease or other problem later in the growing season. Even the most experienced vegetable gardener will lose some plants every season. Also, plant a few extra for your neighbors, your local soup kitchen or food bank.

Don't forget to visit ....

<http://www.chesapeake.va.us/services/depart/agricul/master-gard.html> (Chesapeake MG Programs)

<http://www.vbmg.org> (Virginia Beach MG Programs)

[www.ext.vt.edu/resources](http://www.ext.vt.edu/resources) (Virginia Tech Gardening Information)

<http://www.virginiazoo.org/horticulture/> (Virginia Zoo Horticulture)

<http://norfolkbotanicalgarden.org> (Norfolk Botanical Garden)

<http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce> (York County MG Programs)

<http://jccwmg.org/> (James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardeners)

<http://members.cox.net/fhcgarden/> (Fred Heutte Center Information)

<http://www.tidewaterbeekeepers.org/> (Tidewater Beekeepers Association)

**FEBRUARY PRUNING CALENDAR:** Changes from previous month underlined. The below pruning calendar applies to all of Virginia and was compiled by Virginia Tech. Shrubs and trees have 'Best time to Prune' months, 'Do not Prune' months, or timing is not critical months. Those plants listed below are the "best time to prune" or 'do not prune'. If a tree or shrub is not listed, then timing is not critical this month. The best time to prune is based upon optimizing flowers or fruits and reducing summer/winter stresses. Deadheading or removing spent flowers on flowering shrubs is OK all growing season, for plants such as Rose, Crepe Myrtle, Butterfly bushes, etc. Pruning to remove diseased or dead branches is necessary when you see them. Contact your local extension agent if you need more detailed information about any specific plant. REMEMBER to keep your pruning equipment sharp. Make sure you clean them each time you prune with 9 parts water to 1 part bleach solution or the same ratio water to antiseptic mouthwash to prevent the spread of plant disease.

When the weather is hot and dry, try to avoid pruning your plants. If you do, the plant will require extra water. Wait for cooler days if at all possible.

(NOTE: For those of you who live in the more temperate (Hampton Roads) or coastal areas of VA or NC you may want to hold off pruning any Shrubs and Trees marked with an \* until January or February as these plants produce flowers on new seasons growth. Coastal areas tend to get some sustained warm days in winter and the plants can be 'tricked' into thinking spring is here only do be hit with a frost and kill some of the new flower buds.)

**Shrubs:** Abelia, Arborvitae, Beautyberry, Boxwood, Butterfly Bush\*, Chastetree, Cherrylaurel, Clethra, Cotoneaster, Crape Myrtle\*, Dogwood (Red Twig), Eleagnus (thorny), Euonymus (evergreen/deciduous), Gardenia, Holly (deciduous), Hibiscus (incl: Rose of Sharon & Althea), Hydrangea (summer/late blooming), Hypericum (St. Johnswort), Juniper, Nandina, Osmanthus Holly, Photinia, Pittosporum, Privet (Ligustrum), Potentilla, Rose, Smoke Tree, Spirea (Summer Blooming), Sumac, and Yew.

**Do Not Prune:** Flowering Almond, Aucuba, Azalea, Barberry, Bayberry, Beautybush, Broom (Cytisus), Camellia japonica (spring bloomer), Camellia sansanqua (fall bloomers), Daphne, Deutzia, Forsythia, Fothergilla, Harry Lauder (Walking Stick), Holly (evergreen), Honeysuckle, Hydrangea (Spring Blooming), Indian Hawthorne, Jasmine (winter), Kerria, Leucothoe, Lilac, Mahonia (Orange Grapeholly), Mockorange, Mountain Laurel, Pearlbush, Pieris, Mugo Pine, Pyracantha, Quince, Rhododendron, Serviceberry, Spirea (Spring Blooming), Sweetshrub, Viburnum, Weigela, Pussy Willow, and Witch hazel.

**Evergreen Trees:** (Seldom need pruning. Most evergreen trees are pruned during the winter months.) Arborvitae, Atlas Cedar, Deodar Cedar, Chamaecyparis, Fir, Holly (evergreen), Juniper/Red Cedar, Leyland Cypress, Southern Magnolia, and Live Oak.

**Do Not Prune:** None.

**Deciduous Trees:** Alder and Crape Myrtle.

**Do Not Prune:** (except to correct damage): Birch, Buckeye, Flowering Cherry, Crabapple, Dogwood, Elm, Fringe Tree, Hawthorn, Horsechestnut, Magnolia, Maple, Flowering (Peach, Pear or Plum), Redbud, or Serviceberry.

**Mark your calendar:** (open to everyone and free unless indicated)

**February 7 (Wednesday):** Lunch and Learn: **Pruning Workshop** with Kerry Goldmeyer, Master Gardener. **Noon** at the Chesapeake Central Library. She will address questions of how and when to prune deciduous trees and shrubs, azaleas, camellias, and ornamental grasses. Bring a bag lunch. Call 382-6348 for more information.

**February 19 (Sat): 10 AM:** "**Grafting Seminar**" at the Shawboro Ruritan Building on Route 34, in Shawboro, NC. The speaker is Ozzie Coor of Coor Farm Supply in Smithfield, NC. Any questions or directions call the NC Cooperative Extension office, Currituck County Center at 232-2262.

**February thru May:** **HRT 116 - Home Horticulture**. This course covers the basics of home horticulture - soils and fertilizers, plant pests, basic landscaping - plant selection, installation, maintenance, and basic gardening techniques. Where: Tidewater Community College - Chesapeake Campus, 1428 Cedar Road, Chesapeake. When: (10) Mondays, February 23 - May 4, 6:30 - 9:15 PM and (5) Saturdays, April 2 - 30, 9 AM - 12:00 PM How Much? In-state tuition is \$216.60. For more information call Ken Spencer, 822-5149 and or e-mail [wkspen@mac.com](mailto:wkspen@mac.com).

**February (every Saturdays): “Pruning Ornamental Trees and Shrubs”** The Virginia Cooperative Extension office of York County will conduct useful pruning workshops for the homeowner Clinic dates and locations (in York County) are as follows. All clinics are held from 10 a.m. to noon:

- Feb. 5 - Grafton True Value Hardware off of Route 17
- Feb 12 - Banbury Cross in Upper York County
- Feb 19 - Marlbank Farms in York County
- Feb 26 - Ken Matthews Landscape Nursery off of Route 17

All workshops and clinics are free. Register at [www.yorkcounty.gov/vce](http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce), “Upcoming Events,” or call 890-4940.

**March 9: (Wednesday):** Center for Coastal Resources Management wetlands program will hold a wet lands seminar at Gloucester Point on Comprehensive review of tidal wetlands, community functions and values, and living shorelines stewardship. For more info contact Dawn Fleming at [DawnF@vims.edu](mailto:DawnF@vims.edu). Registration Deadline is March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**April 9 (Saturday) 9:30 – 11:30 AM:** Warm Season Lawn Care Class at the Chesapeake Public Main Library. Take a free lawn care class from Virginia Cooperative Extension’s Grass Guru Program and learn environmentally friendly lawn care. Jim Lachowicz, Master Gardener and turf specialist, will be the speaker, and will de-mystify Warn Season Lawn Care. Call 382-6348 for more information.

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"Commercial products are named in this newsletter for informational purposes only and are not endorsed by the newsletter editor or staff. Virginia Cooperative Extension does not endorse these products and does not intend discrimination against other products which also may be suitable."

If you have any questions, you can call or visit your local Virginia Cooperative Extension Chesapeake Master Gardener office. You can contact your local Extension Office.

Virginia (area code 757):

Chesapeake:	382-6348	Eastern Shore:	414-0731	Hampton:	727-1401
James City:	566-1367	Newport News:	591-4838	Norfolk:	683-2816
Portsmouth:	393-5314	Suffolk:	923-2050	Virginia Beach:	427-4769
York County:	890-4940				

North Carolina (area code 252):

Currituck:	232-2262	Dare:	473-4290	Pasquotank:	338-3954
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Happy Gardening!!!***