

## March Gardening Tasks & Tips



According to the old saying, March roars in like a lion and leaves like a lamb. As I write this, it's snowing outside. Yesterday, it was in the 60s; my husband and I pruned and checked all the fruit trees in the orchard, working outdoors in just jeans and sweatshirts while the warm breeze rustle the pines and the cats played in the wheelbarrow. Today, temperatures plunged into the 20s, and by tonight, they will be in the single digits. The cats are inside snuggled by the heater and the crocus you see at the top of this page, blooming on Saturday when I snapped this photo, is now buried under several inches of snow and ice on Monday. Welcome to March in Virginia.

March typically heralds the official start of gardening season here at Seven Oaks. We prune the fruit trees, gently coaxing them into the appropriate shapes to bear fruit and check them for diseases. I start planning the first chores of spring: moving perennials, planting vegetables, starting seeds. The last of the seeds arrived today and will be started under lights in the basement. Although spring feels like it will never come, within 30 days we will be working outside again in our sweatshirts, and within 60 days, it will be time to plant tomatoes. Spring is coming closer, day by day.



### March Gardening Tips

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- Prune shrubs and trees now before they leaf out. The EXCEPTIONS are spring-flowering shrubs; do not prune them now. Wait until they bloom, then prune them immediately after blooming. When in doubt, consult a qualified expert at your local Cooperative Extension Office or a good plant book.
- Start vegetable and flower seeds now that need to be started indoors. Many perennial flowers need several weeks of growth before moving them outside. In most parts of the country, tomatoes, peppers and other garden vegetables should be started inside. Consult the seed packages for instructions about where and how to start seeds. Some prefer to be grown directly in garden soil, while others must be started indoors.
- Don't forget to sterilize pots and equipment before planting seeds. Mix a solution of 1/4 cup of household bleach with 1 gallon of water in a well-ventilated area. Soak pots for 10 minutes, remove and rinse with clean water.
- Purchase potato, onion and garlic starter sets now for best selection.
- Spring bulbs are tough. If snow covers them, don't worry. They will bounce back.
- Weed around spring bulbs by hands so you don't disturb them.
- If you pick your spring flowers, don't mix daffodils with other flowers. Daffodil stems exude a sap that shortens the life of other cut flowers. Place daffodils in

their own separate vase or container, and rinse it carefully with soap and water after use.

- Start making notes now about what you want to accomplish in the garden this year. Soon it will get so busy you won't have time to think!
- Start a garden journal. Use it to keep your notes handy.
- Check power tools such as lawn mowers and edgers now. Have them serviced by a qualified professional if they require serving. Have lawn mower blades sharpened.
- Clean and repaint bird baths now, to give them plenty of time to dry.
- It's tempting to rush into the garden to plow or turn under the soil as soon as the snow melts, but you can actually damage your garden soil by doing this. Instead, wait until it is relatively dry before plowing, rototilling or working in the garden soil.
- To keep your house clean and free from mud, place a tray near the door and slip off your gardening boots or shoes near the door. Invest in a pair of gardening boots or clogs now; a good pair of gloves will also protect your hands.

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