

# Garden Club Horticultural Hints March 2023

## Time to take out those gardening clothes!



**Enjoy spring 2023 and envision 2024.** Take a walk around your yard (staying off muddy ground) and enjoy the earliest flowers. Witch hazels (*Hamamelis*) are in bloom and cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*) are close behind. As the ground warms, look for hellebore blooms to put in an appearance along with the early bulbs such as snowdrops, Siberian squills and crocus. Don't have any planted bulbs or early shrubs? Make notes on where they would look great (and where the snow melts more quickly), take photos of the best sites, and tag them so you don't forget where to plant this autumn for the spring of 2024.

**Spring wake-up call.** With more sunlight coming in the windows, your houseplants should be waking up. If you haven't already, begin fertilizing lightly (see the photo for an idea of fertilizer strength) to feed the new growth. Don't forget to keep the humidity up with misting or pebble trays—our homes remain very dry as long as the heating systems are on. Trim off any ragged or weary leaves – the plant will look better immediately and the new leaves will have room and light to grow.



**Time to repot houseplants.** Now is a good time to report your houseplants, especially if you did not do so last fall. Remove any soil with salt build-up (the crusty stuff on top) and some of the old soil from around the roots. The pot should be only 1-2 inches larger than the current pot, clean, and with good drainage. Most houseplants are happy with commercial or homemade potting mix if you are a do-it-your-selfer (Google 'Cornell potting mix'). Be certain to add sand to any mix when transplanting succulents or cacti and use small bark chunks for orchid pots. Once securely in the new home, water them with a dilute fertilizer solution to help them settle in and get off to a growing start.



*Salts build up both in the soil of houseplants as well as on their containers. March is the ideal month to move your plants into larger pots and replenish their soil.*

**Refurbish the old.** There is more to gardening than plants. Use these cold and wet days to spruce up outdoor furniture—sand and refinish wood, remove rust and repaint metal. If your refurbishing work cries out for new fabric for the cushions, you'll be glad you did it when you are ready to use them in the warm months.







**Perennial care.** When your spring bulbs appear, sprinkle a small amount of organic fertilizer and lime around - not on - the new greens. This will wash into the soil with spring rains and help the bulb get ready for next year's flowers. This year's flower is already in the bulb, waiting for the right weather to appear. An application of organic mulch around the foliage will keep weeds down around the bulbs and add organic to the soil later. If you planted your bulbs among perennials, (good for hiding the bulb foliage as it dies) do not mulch until the perennials are up.

*Sprinkle a small amount of lime and an organic fertilizer around the newly emerged greens of your bulbs.*

**Don't be in a rush to uncover** bulb beds, perennials, shrubs or roses you gave extra protection to last fall. This may have been an exceptionally mild winter, but Mother Nature isn't through with us just because the calendar says March. While temperatures usually warm quickly at the end of the month, they can still be quite cold in early April with the possibility of late-season snow and ice storms.

*Last fall's leaves provide a much-needed layer of protection for your perennials against late-season snow and ice storms*



**An unwanted guest** is likely to make an unwanted, early appearance in your garden. Our mild winter means ticks will be out early this year, looking for the blood that allows them to move to their next life-stage. Climate change has allowed new species such as the Lone Star tick (pictured), which is host to white-cell-killing Ehrlichiosis, to firmly establish itself in New England.



### **Stay off soggy ground!**

Compacted soil means no tiny spaces for new roots to grow into, and no place for water to percolate through. Mother Nature reverses compaction by freezing and thawing. But wet spring soils can become as hard as concrete when walked upon. If you are leaving footprints as you walk on lawns, gardens or around trees and shrubs, you are compacting your soil. Stay on paths until the soil dries.

*Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for March and throughout the year, please visit [www.BettyOnGardening.com](http://www.BettyOnGardening.com)*