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Coming Out Too Soon

Early signs of spring push planters outside

Last month's snowfall really gave Portland the feeling that winter was in full force. I wouldn't have guessed that, mere weeks later, I would be running around outside in just short sleeves. It seems a bit premature to think about spring, but I can't help but notice the very first signs of it outside. I just returned from a walk, and in almost every yard that I passed, there were signals of new growth. Already, daffodils have sprouted up, some crocuses are in flower, camellias are starting to show off their blooms. I have even started to notice the first signs of life on some of the leafless shrubs.

All of this gets me especially excited when I talk to my family back in Wisconsin and hear that the high temperature for the day was minus 9 degrees. Temperatures in the negative are just too cold for my gay ass. Besides, I would miss the fun in telling my family that it's nearly 60 degrees as I can hear their teeth chattering over the phone.

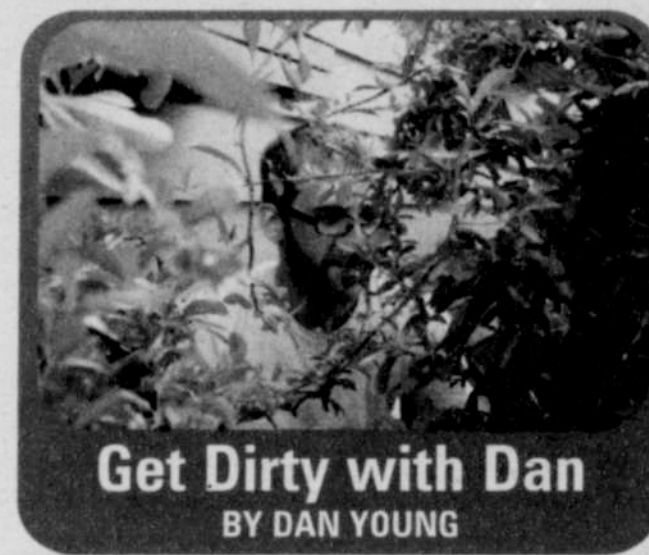
I can't imagine leaving Portland to live somewhere that is covered in snow and ice for six months out of the year. I grew up doing that. I do love reminiscing about the first warm spring days in May when I was growing up. I recall my sister and I skipping through the fields behind our house, plucking the first dandelions to see who liked butter, and when the old lilac hedge bloomed, we would climb up into it and cut bouquets big enough to fill five-gallon buckets. There are countless photos of me as a boy sniffing flowers with my pinkies out.

When I was young, nothing compared to the spring, besides birthday parties and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Now that I'm older, the first warm days are still just as awesome, birthday parties are OK, and I still think Beau and Luke Duke are totally hunky (the originals, of course).

These noticeably warmer, longer, drier days give me the bug that I haven't felt in months, and I'm not the only one. Paula e-mailed me to say:

DEAR DIRTY DAN:

This nice weather has made it harder for me to spend afternoons inside when I want to be out in my yard. I am a bit concerned that I might be jumping the gun by going to a nursery to buy a bunch of plants. I know that it will get cold again, but isn't there something that I could plant now or that I should be doing at this time of year?



Get Dirty with Dan
 BY DAN YOUNG

Well, Paula, in my opinion, if you have already prepared garden beds and want to fill in spaces, I think it is perfectly fine to do some planting now. Of course, make sure the plants you are purchasing are tough enough to withstand the frosts and freezes that will surely happen in the next few months. A lot of nurseries will start carrying fruit trees and fruiting shrubs like blueberries, raspberries and currants in the next few weeks. Those things would be fine to plant now, without any worries. Any other perennials or deciduous shrubs should be fine to put in the ground, too. Not to mention that you could plant some pansies, and who doesn't like pansies?

Paula, you could also prune your rose bushes. (I don't know if you have any, but I assume you do since this is the City of Roses.) Mid- to late February is the perfect time to do so. Most any other pruning could also be done at this time of year, not to mention weeding, the last bits of raking or, my favorite, ripping plants out that are not to your liking anymore.

As long as you aren't itching to plant your tomatoes, get back out in your garden already. Of course, when in doubt about the season or seedling, you can always ask someone like me or the smart people who work at retail nurseries. I'm sure that once you get outside, you will find tons of things that need retooling, revamping and planting.

I suppose I should follow my own advice. From where I sit, the sun is shining and a few branches should be cut back. I'm logging off to work outside before the rain returns. 10

To reach DIRTY DAN, who will answer any and all of your gardening questions, simply e-mail dirtydthegardener@yahoo.com.



Sprouting crocuses signal springtime in the Northwest.

