

# Diggin' In The Dirt: *March...Finally! Boots On, Shovels Up!*

By Kim Camarda



Plant your new roses now and prune your established ones.

This is a great time to prune and train your grapes, and vines, too.

Clematis, honeysuckle and climbing roses are just budding in and you can see the structure of the plant better. You can really see if something's been weakened or broken during the winter. Check all your trees and shrubs for winter damage and monitor new shoots and buds for disease and deficiencies. Catch it early. Also, catch the nasty thick-rooted weeds now, too, and you can reduce weeding later on.

If it dries out a bit, you can start to divide perennials like chrysanthemum, echinacea, and rutabega.

Bulbs can be planted later into the month. If yours are in the ground, crocus, hyacinth and tulips should be coming up already.

If you have yet to plant cover crops but struggle with your soil, why

not just give a small space a try this year. I think I am going to start rotating a 3'x3' square space of various cover crops throughout my yard for the next few years. I inherited almost an acre that was entirely lawn for many, many years. The soil seems stripped of any actual nutrients, so it's first aid for the dirt, first thing. Cover crops can be a utilitarian crop as well if you grow edibles... You can combine a legume with a grass or cereal plant crop to produce and store nitrogen in the ground, or peas and winter wheat or rye. Some of these combinations can yield foods that can also be harvested and eaten by various animals, and even family members. Who doesn't love the wheat berry? I wouldn't till or dig anything until it's been dry for longer periods of time. The ground is still saturated.

Time to maintain and refresh your lawns, so a note about moss in your lawns. Moss has various causes and is a symptom, not a cause, of trouble in your lawn area. Lawns that don't receive enough nitrogen are prone to moss growth. Lawns don't grow well in highly acid soils. You can improve

the health of your lawn by liming if your soil is overly acid. In dense shade, grass does not get enough light to grow well and moss will take over. If the moss occurs under a tree, think about thinning the canopy of that tree and letting some light in, or better yet, go with the flow and have yourself a little moss garden spot.

Grass roots have trouble growing in compacted soil and if the grass isn't growing, the moss will take its place. Aerating your lawn can help and iron is essential. Waterlogged soils can reduce the availability of iron.

My peas have shot up about an inch. It's a good time for cool season veggies like asparagus, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chard and radishes. If you have rabbits, hamsters or guinea pigs, you may want to try growing some kale for them-- they love it. Our chickens eat it, too, and it's a no-brainer. The greens and lettuces, of course, are great this time of year. I keep a "wild salad box" at the back door to eat fresh from. It's salad greens of all sorts. Each year, I try something I've never tried before. I've put in chives and left whatever herbs

lived through the winter. This year, its sage and oregano. I will rotate onions and basil into this box as the temps warm up and the lettuces die off.

It's nice to keep mints in pots at the back door, too, for teas and beverages.

It's also time to check and repair fencing and reinforce livestock pens. Air out places that have been closed up for the winter. Take advantage of those dry days. Oil and sharpen your tools if you haven't already.

And now for something completely different: what I learned about slugs. The small blackish brown ones are referred to as the "European" slugs. They are the main eaters of the tender shoots we work so hard for.

The long green yellow spotted slug is referred to as the "banana" slug and it eats mainly debris like decaying plant material, etc. The medium-long grey-black spotted "leopard" slug is an eater of the greens and lettuces, BUT also eats the European slugs. FYI on the slug control-- **Bonide** makes pet-friendly versions, now non-toxic to animals.

## Barnyard News: *Back in the Saddle*



By Dawn Carr

This month I would like to talk about horseback-riding. With the weather changing to a more mild temperature, we want to get out and start riding those

trails. Before you saddle up, make sure your horse is in good health. Here are some questions you may want to ask yourself: What kind of terrain will we ride in? Do I need shoes on my horse or will boots be sufficient? Is my horse current on his vaccines and worming? Is my tack clean and ready to put on my horse? Is any of my tack old (straps/cinch) and do I need to replace them? Is my saddle pad clean? Will I trailer my horse? If so, you may want to do a check on the floor to make sure there are no rotten boards. Are the tires in good shape?

The way I look at it is like this-- my horse is the least expensive part of my ensemble. Purchasing a horse isn't the expensive part, it's the stuff required to take care of him.

I was out in my barn cleaning stalls today and took a good look at my horse, Chuck. He looked a little on the shabby side. His coat seemed dry and was shedding a bunch. So, after grooming him and getting his stall done, I thought I should check his records and see if he is coming due for anything. To my surprise, he was due again for his wormer. Man, it seemed like I just did that! So I pulled him back out and gave him his wormer. I know he didn't appreciate it, but it was necessary.

I also wanted to talk about selenium. I've heard that we don't have enough selenium in our grasses to meet a horse's needs. There are supplements that you can give to them or even a salt trace mineral block with selenium in it. I was talking with one of my customers about selenium and we found on the internet that fruits like watermelon, mango and dates contain selenium. Also, vegetables like parsnip and asparagus have selenium in them. Before you offer these, check with your veterinarian to see if you can feed them. I have always given watermelon to my horses in the summer; they really love it, but I should really check with my vet first to see if that's OK. I am in no way giving you medical advice, only sharing information I have seen.

When you get out and are riding the trail, one thing to remember when packing your saddlebags are emergency supplies. If your horse were to get cut or receive an injury, it's good to have adequate supplies so you can treat them on the trail. There is no worse feeling then be-

ing out there and not being prepared and helpless. So make sure you have gauze and vet wrap to name a few. I know if there is something that can hurt my horse out on the trail, with his luck, and mine, he's gonna find it!

It's great to be able to start thinking about trail riding again-- just be safe and be prepared. That will make for a great day in the saddle.

Until next month, wishing you a safe and wonderful trail ride!

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