

Diggin' In The Dirt: *Spring, Where Are You?*

By Kim Camarda



As you can probably tell, this year you can still take advantage of April's cooler side. Start with planting cool-season crops. I often include beets or radishes, peas, lettuces and other greens, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and kale, onions and strawberries. I will try carrots every year because I have no luck with them. One day, I will grow a carrot myself and eat it!

Extending your growing season this time of year is as easy as finding the colder spots in and around where you plant. Check for cold spots that get sun, these are the best. Last estimated frost dates around here have been anything from April 26th to May 15th. I personally am just going with the current trend myself of the air being slightly chillier and late season frosts being more likely. I also tell myself that patience is a lesson. Today, as I write this, I am looking at it snow.

Mother Nature is the true indicator of what, when, where and how planting will best take shape.

Ah, Spring, where are you now?... You can anticipate the arrival of 'spring-like weather' by getting your window boxes and pots ready. I bleach-rinse my decorative pots this time of year. The "Magic-Eraser" type sponges are good for removing build-up on lighter-colored plastic pots and window-boxes. If you have dormant plants overwintering in pots, refresh your memory about feeding times and check for fungus or moldy areas in the pot. I will often infuse the soil with some worm com-

post or fish emulsion this early part of the season. As it gets a little warmer and I've had a chance to water, I will work a slow-release fertilizer into the top inch or so of soil.

About the time the tulips stop blooming, the soil has warmed up enough that you can apply a layer of mulch on your flower beds, your raised beds and around your trees and shrubs. It reduces weeds, conserves moisture, and prevents disease. I add a thin layer of compost and, if the compost pile can support it, a few handfuls of worms (this helps even further as the worms will burrow through the clay soil). The burrowing action of the worms will aerate your clay. As they burrow, they will also leave behind their castings which will help add nutrients to the soil. They will amend the soil on a continuing basis and can do wonders in heavy clay areas that tend to dry out.

A percentage of my starts and seedlings will end up in my "animals' garden." I feed my chickens, an old bunny rabbit, and often our dog from an extra "junk" garden. I toss into this raised bed anything that isn't growing great, or is growing well but needs thinning. Food plants that lose their tags get planted here. Excess cuttings or plants from friends grow here. And since the great zucchini harvest of 2008, I will only plant the zucchini in the animals' garden. This garden can often amaze you; mine gets little to no special attention, no sprays, etc... hardly any thinning, pruning or watching goes into this garden for me, yet it grows in wild abundance.

Sometimes this kind of a "caution to the wind" garden can be a relief and wonder for the plant lover.

Try companion planting this year if you have not yet. Often, by companion planting you will see a higher yield and improved disease resistance in both plants. I would suggest that trying a few companions this year and a few more the next, you will start to get the hang of the companion gardening and see what works for you. I would not suggest you get the massive chart and try doing your whole garden the first year. The information can be overwhelming. Try one or two things you already grow well and add a companion. As an example-- the cabbage family likes to be planted with beets or leafy greens. Certain herbs will help cabbages by deterring pests. Mint will also improve the flavor of cabbages. Another example is the marigold. Planted near anything, they repel many unwanted insects. You can plant marigolds around tomatoes to repel the tomato-eating worms. The big ones can devour an entire tomato plant in one night. Plant marigolds in and around your entire vegetable patch!

Chives grown beneath apple trees will help to prevent apple scab; beneath roses, they will keep away aphids and blackspot, and will deter aphids on lettuce and peas. Spray made from chive will deter downy and powdery mildew on gooseberries and cucumbers

Many old-fashioned vegetable gardens, often called kitchen gardens, mixed vegetable plants, herbs and flowers together. Not only does this type of garden look beautiful, but it also harnesses the power of nature to create an organic garden that naturally repels unwanted pests and invites beneficial ones.

The subject of companions is extensive and the history long. The first companion plantings were practiced in

various forms by Native Americans prior to the arrival of Europeans. One common planting was of corn and pole beans together. The cornstalk would serve as a trellis for the beans to climb while the beans would fix nitrogen for the corn. The inclusion of squash with these two plants completes the Three Sisters technique, pioneered by Native American peoples.

Kim Camarda is the owner of Camarda Gardens at 1103 Bridge St. in Vernonia. Kim is a graduate of the Floral Design Institute and has years of landscape design experience in three different states. She hopes to grow her business to include modern-day homesteading practices and supplies including hands-on workshops. You can reach Kim at (503) 805-7575.

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Barnyard News:

By Dawn Carr



As we head into Spring, this month I would like to discuss barn maintenance tips.

First, let's think about the mud issues we have had over the winter. Now is a good time to take a picture of the area, so when it dries out you can reflect back and fix the issues. And this will help if you decide to hire a contractor. You can show him the picture of what exactly it is your barn issues are.

There are a lot of things to consider when spring cleaning. If you are going to sweep out your hayloft, remember not to just sweep it out the door. There are several reasons for not doing this; one important reason is it adds to more mud in the winter. I would recommend putting it in your compost pile to re-use for your summer garden. Cobwebs are dust and hay collectors, they are also very inflammable. Remember that what you do now will help keep down the fire hazards you may have this summer.

Electrical should also be on your list. Rodents like to chew and have been known to chew through wire. When checking your electrical, make sure to first turn your breakers off so as not to get shocked.

Water troughs need a good cleaning, also. It never fails-- your water troughs fill with slime and algae even in the colder months. What I like to do is scrub it with a broom and then, once its nice and clean, I like to throw a few goldfish in there. These little guys are fantastic at keeping down the mosquito larvae. Keeping that in mind, I like to move my

Time for Spring Cleaning

water trough to a more shaded area as I like to keep the water a little cooler in the hotter months of summer.

Stall-cleaning should also be on your agenda. I like to use the pressure washer on my stall mats and then let the sun dry them out. There are also chemicals you can use to dry them-- I personally don't like them, as I like to use my barn cleanup as mulch for my garden or my friends' gardens.

Having clean brushes is important for the health of horses, and dirty brushes will just put dirt back on the horse. Brushes should get washed on a regular basis with warm, soapy water. You can clean the hair from the brush bristles using a metal currycomb and then soak the brushes for a few minutes to loosen any mud and caked on dirt. Scrub the brushes against each other to clean the bristles well, and then rinse off the soap. It's a good idea to clean out the brush tote at the same time.

Tack and accessories need a good cleaning, also. Even if you didn't use your saddle over the winter, it will get mold and dirt on it. I like to use good old glycerine soap. I wet the soap and use a dry towel or toothbrush to clean my tack. I try to avoid getting my leather too wet. I then like to use a good conditioner for the leather. There are several brands available out there for any type of budget.

Barn cleaning can actually be fun; call a friend and see if they want to swap barn chores. Many hands make light work. Why not throw a BBQ together and get to cleaning? It will give you that much more time to ride this summer.

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