

Early spring is the right time to hunt for good gardening tools

GARDEN MIND

By Rebecca Hart

Here in the Northwest how do we tell spring is close by? From the sounds. All manner of birds return, filling the air with song.

Frogs of different sizes contribute their peeps, ribbets and croaks. We are fortunate: while another polar freeze blankets the north and northeast parts of the country, here the days approach mildness.

Temperatures nudge up into the 50s, and the intrepid gardener ventures outside. What to do? Where to begin? Are you anxious to plant seeds? To settle bright primroses or potted spring bulbs for some needed color?

For me the early work is tempered by the idea to "start where I am." What I see, what I need to do, what I'm most capable of completing given the resources at hand. This reckoning doesn't always match with my ambitions, but I'm learning to aim for completion, which means chunking stuff down.

I like to divide seasonal garden tasks into categories. Indoor and planning tasks. Outdoor weather-dependent projects. Planning and executing shopping trips. The busy mind of the gardener considers the possibilities.

If you use a garden journal you can refer to prior years' notes to get a read on your garden. Inventory the garage or potting shed for items to replace, or to recycle.

If you have chemicals you don't wish to use, take them to a Metro station. Have you thought about adding a garden structure, or decided to do some hardscaping, requiring new layouts of beds and walkways?

Maybe it's time to consider getting a new tool or gadget to make the work go easier.

Whether you buy your garden goods via Internet, retail, or garage sale, remember this—every craftsperson of any discipline respects and hunts for good tools: gardener, cook, woodworker. Here's a short list of my essential tools.

Soil thermometer: Invest in a good one. It indicates soil temperatures. Why? Early spring is when the enthusiast plants seeds. Often seeds sprout easy-peasy. But seeds are especially sensitive to soil temperatures and off-timing can result in germination fail. Don't let it happen to you.

Garden journal: If you don't have one, get one. If you are serious about your garden, get a journal. Make regular short entries.

Gloves: I use latex or nitrile for everyday gardening; I like the tactile sense. Buy gloves on sale, stock up, and throw out the old ones seasonally.

Hand hygiene: If you can't abide gloves but need to keep your hands clean, get a jar of Barrier Cream, from art supply stores. Run soap under your fingernails for quick clean-up. Avoid skin cleaners with "micro-beads," a newly discovered ecological complication. If your hands tend toward soreness, consider "craft" compression-style



New foliage on a Japanese maple is a sure sign of spring. (Post photo by Rebecca Hart)

fingerless jersey gloves

Hoses: Invest in good hoses, nozzles and shutoffs. These pay for themselves. Do not let your hose kink. Ever. Use a good shut-off valve to stop water. *Never, ever* kink a hose to close off the water.

Hand tools: Japanese wrought iron hand weeder, three prong. Fishtail or dandelion weeder. Narrow trowel that doubles as a bulb planter. Japanese serrated garden knife for cutting root divisions, string, landscape cloth, or cleaning between bricks or decking. Two pairs of garden pruners like Felco or Corona. Typically I lose mine so I buy knock-offs, and replace them as needed.

Small sharpening stone. Long-handled pruners. A small step stool (I don't sit on ground, or kneel, or stoop). Con-

struction wheelbarrow. Tool bucket to carry it all in. Twenty-gallon black pots for weeding.

Full size tools: Shovels, one with a small head, another one regular-size. D-handle narrow spading fork. Long-handled cultivator.

Those are the basic tools I use these every day I'm in the garden; the rest are treats. In time you'll add to your list of essentials.

This winter, Mother Nature has been sending us some extreme weather and how it presents in Oregon is anybody's guess. As gardeners we do the best we can.

If droughty conditions prevail this year, water-recycling and proper mulching will become big concerns. See you in the garden.

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