

GARDENING TIPS FOR FEBRUARY

By Nancy Hillin, Somervell County Master Gardener

There are many adjectives to describe the anxiety gardeners experience while awaiting the arrival of favorable weather conditions that allow them to pursue their gardening passions. Some gardeners experience “itchy green thumb”, while others are subjected to “cabin fever”. But, of course, there are those die-hard gardeners that find a way to beat any conditions to satisfy their gardening desires. February is the month to finish pruning, so here are some reminders about pruning and other preparations for spring.

Mid-February is the best time to prune roses or after the last hard freeze and before new growth appears. This also holds true for pruning fruit trees, if you did not have the opportunity to finish pruning in January. If you plan on planting new roses or fruit trees, get them in the ground this month. For more information on planting fruit trees, read Josh Blane’s, Somervell County Extension Agent/AG/NR, Texas Cooperative Extension, article in the January Somervell County Master Gardeners newsletter (<http://newsletter.somervellmastergardeners.org>). Remember to train climbing roses to a fence or trellis and secure with jute twine to prevent wind damage. Climbing roses do not need pruning, but should have any of last year’s tangled growth trimmed. This is a good time to transplant existing mature or established shrubs while they are still dormant. Delay using any fertilizer until they start growing. Use the contents of your compost pile to spread around established plants and the soil surface beneath and around the drip lines of shrubs and trees. As the compost further decomposes, nutrients will be released to the plants. Keep a watchful eye on junipers and other evergreens for bagworm pouches. Hand removal and burning the pouches seems to be the best remedy for bag worms.

The accepted method for cutting back perennials is to prune to the ground line before any new spring growth appears. There has been a new thought that because many beneficial insects lay their eggs on the top growth of perennials it would behoove us to be selective in those plants we cut to the ground. When choosing new annuals and perennials for a spring garden, think about trying a butterfly seed mix. Plant the seeds close together to lure the butterflies and other beneficial insects to the nectar source. Flowering herbs are great attractors for all pollinating insects. Another bonus to using herbs is that most of them are deer resistant. This gardener has found the flowers of basil to be a great draw for honeybees and dill for butterflies. If you have ever let radishes or carrots go to flower, you know that they are a strong attraction to many beneficial insects.

If you have not already done so, now is the time to prepare beds and garden areas for a spring garden. If you have truly been bitten by the “gardening bug” this is the latest you may start seeds of warm season flowers and vegetables indoors in flats or containers in time for spring planting. Make sure the yearly maintenance is done on your lawnmowers and trimmers. Keep birdbaths and puddlers clean and full. Clean bird feeders and keep them supplied with your yard bird’s favorite seeds and treats. Be of good cheer, spring will be here before you know it!

Sources: Texas Agri-Life Extension Service Garden Checklist.com; Garden Stops.com

Texas Gardener Magazine