

Take stock when heading outside for spring yardwork

Catherine Whitnall

The combination of nicer weather and more people at home is no doubt giving way to thoughts of spring yardwork and preparing flower and garden beds.

There's nothing wrong with getting a bit of a jump on things — especially since many people have extra time on their hands these days — so here are a few tips on how to get off to the right start.

Judy Kennedy is the co-founder of EcoStewards, with Robbie Preston, and a Bee City Kawartha Lakes pollinator action committee member.

The Cameron-area resident's spring gardening actually starts in the fall. Each year she leaves her perennials standing, providing seeds for the birds and habitat for overwintering insects. The dead plant stalks can be cleared once the temperature stays consistently above zero.

One of the most effective ways to dispose of the stalks is to compost them, says Kennedy. Just cut them into short lengths and that will help with raking up the debris and breaking down the vegetative matter.

When it comes to “feeding” beds, Kennedy recommends using alfalfa pellets that can be purchased at local feed stores.

“Alfalfa is a great natural source for nitrogen, as well as phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulphur, magnesium, boron, iron, and zinc, which are essential for healthy and abundant plant growth,” explained Kennedy. “In addition to its nutritional benefits, it helps to build organic matter, which loosens soil and holds moisture, feeds microorganisms, stimulates growth, boosts harvest yield and controls harmful nematodes that can hurt roots.”

Kennedy also recommends people opt out of raking up spring leaves and sending them off to the landfill.

“Instead, spread them out on your driveway and pull your lawn mower backwards over them to chop them up and dig them into your gardens and around your perennials and shrubs,” said Kennedy, noting maple, oak, ash, willow and fruit tree leaves contain valuable nutrients that provide soil improvement benefits.

Caution is advised, however, for those with black walnut, butternut or hickory trees, as these species produce a toxin in their roots, bark and leaves that could be detrimental to garden beds.

It's also a good time of year to split up perennials that have become aggressive and taken over gardens. Dig out the root ball and with a sharp spade, cut it straight through, from top to root bottom, into a couple or several pieces, depending on the

size.

“Plant the severed pieces out in different areas or pot them up and put them out on the curb with a ‘free plants’ sign to share with your neighbours,” suggested Kennedy.

When it comes to the larger items on one’s property, Rockwood Forest Nurseries owner Santosh Patel offers these tips.

The first is to take inventory, said Patel.

“Walk around your yard and take a survey. Start from the top. Do any tree limbs need to be removed or cut?” asked Patel. “Go to the mid-level and cut down last year’s perennial foliage. Go to the ground and rake beds and lawn. Finally check your stairs, fences and other structures for damage.”

Speaking of damage, Patel also suggests people check their tools — including the lawn mower — to make sure they are in good condition or find out if they need to be sharpened.

Spring is a time of renewal and that goes for lawns and plant beds as well.

When it comes to lawns, Patel recommends starting with a good cleaning followed by a top up of quality lawn seed and topsoil. Beds can be prepared by stirring up the soil to relieve compaction and allow oxygen to start flowing through the ground. Remove debris and add a fresh layer of mulch to help suppress weeds retain moisture.

Many horticulture and gardening businesses in the Kawarthas continue to operate and stock a wide range of products for purchase. Orders can be made online or by phone and either shipped curbside or arrangements can be made for contactless pickup.