

# Gardening Weather is great

By Lynda Nykor

April this year seems to have fallen short of being the cruelest month here in southern York Region. For most of its 30 days we've had perfect weather for getting outside to start putting the garden in shape. There are a number of things you should either have done already or have plans for doing in the next couple of weeks. You should certainly have given your lawn its first feeding by now. A fertilizer with the

first number of its three-part formula higher than the others is best. This means you've got a high nitrogen food that will quickly green up your grass. Winter mulches should be removed, especially if you've used material that could harbor disease or pests close to the plants. Soil should be removed from around roses, and the dead canes should be cut back. It's a good idea to plant some lettuce now — the cool nights will keep it from getting a bitter

taste. If frost threatens, cover it overnight with newspaper or plastic. Prune shrubs that like an early spring barbing now, for instance, hydrangea. You can plant seeds for hardy annuals now. Alyssum, annual phlox, cosmos, poppies and sweet peas are just a few that will stand up to cool nights. Iris should be getting a feeding, but don't feed them again until next spring. You can also, to

paraphrase Candide, start cultivating your garden now. Dig the area you'll be using for vegetables. Turn the clods of earth on their sides, so you're not turning topsoil to the bottom. Add material such as composted manure, well-aged, sand and peat moss to keep the soil both rich in nutrients and friable. Dig flower beds and add peat moss, compost or additional loam.

## Prepare your tools

Gardening is much easier when tools are in good working order, says R. F. Gomme, Ontario ministry of agriculture and food horticulturist. "If you didn't prepare your garden tools last fall, now is the time to clean, recondition and repair them." Metal parts should be cleaned with steel wool to remove the rust. Rub all metal parts with an oily cloth to prevent further decay. Gomme says edges of shovels, hoes, spades and lawn mower blades can be sharpened easily with a file. "Lawn mowers will use less fuel and will be more efficient if they are well maintained." Gomme also suggests

To get your lawn mower back into good working order, first wash the visible parts with kerosene or fuel oil to remove dirt, grease, oil or clippings that may have accumulated last season. Remove the air cleaner and clean it according to the manufacturer's instructions. Drain dirty oil from the crankcase and replace with fresh oil of the proper weight. Clean or replace spark plugs. Check the blade with the spark plug wire disconnected, and sharpen the blade if necessary. Take care not to sharpen the blade out of balance. Gomme also suggests

washing all plastic garden tools such as hoses, and storing them out of direct sunlight. "Simple care and maintenance of garden tools now can save a great deal of time once the gardening season begins," he says.

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## Garden hedges are great

Hedges are an attractive and economical alternative to traditional fences, says R.F. Gomme, Ontario ministry of agriculture and food horticulturist.

Low-grown hedges are ideal for bordering a garden. Medium-sized hedges are best used for separating different parts of the garden. Tall hedges can be used as screens for privacy.

When selecting plants for a hedge, consider their purpose and the amount of maintenance they will receive.

"If it is a formal hedge it will require trimming annually, or more frequently, depending on the species. Hedges which are allowed to grow in a natural manner with some removal of straggly growth are informal in appearance and require less upkeep."

For trimmed hedges consider evergreen, such as Japanese yew, white cedar, hemlock or spruce. For natural growing hedges select spirea, lilac, forsythia, honeysuckle or shrub roses.

The higher the hedge desired, the farther apart each plant should be spaced.

Gomme suggests planting hedges about one foot apart if they are to mature at one to two feet in height. Hedges to mature at three to five feet can be spaced

15 to 20 inches apart and taller hedges should be planted 30 inches apart.

It is not necessary to buy the largest plants, says Gomme. But the bigger the root system, the better.

To plant the hedge, dig a straight trench at least 18 inches deep, keeping the topsoil separate from the subsoil. The trench should be wider and deeper than the size of the root system.

Set each plant in a row, about two inches deeper than at the nursery. Fill in with topsoil mixed with peat moss. Firm the soil around each plant.

Gomme suggests using a line to prune at least one-third of the top growth. If this is not done, hedges will be thick at the top and sparse at the base.

Fertilize along each side with balanced fertilizer such as 7-7-7 at about one pound for every 15 feet of hedge. Water frequently until the plants are established.

## Choose right shrubs

Shrubs can be useful tools in home landscaping, says R.F. Gomme, Ontario ministry of agriculture and food horticulturist.

"When choosing shrubs for your property, purchase them from local nurseries or garden centers. Usually, nurserymen have selected shrubs that have proven themselves adaptable to the area. Then be sure the gardener can then home garden area is fresh from the ground and climatized to local conditions."

The sooner the shrub is back into its natural place in the soil the better.

Although it will take longer to get the desired growth, Gomme advises home gardeners to buy small, young shrubs.

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