

SPRING OUT OF HIBERNATION

Spring brings a sense of excitement and anticipation to those tired of being cooped up indoors for the long winter months. This is especially true for gardeners – spring means it's time to get growing again.

For many people, just the act of digging in the soil can be very uplifting. But equally satisfying is the beauty a well-kept garden can add to your home. If you are thinking of selling your home, landscaping can actually increase your home's "curb appeal" and "saleability."

Even if you don't consider yourself a green thumb, you can enjoy the art of adding colour and life to your garden. And, there are plenty of places to turn for tips and advice. Your local library or bookstore will have a variety of books and magazines to help you and the Internet has an abundance of gardening information as well.

Where to begin

You may be looking out the window at a lot of dead plants, leaves and debris leftover from the winter. The first job for most people will be a thorough clean up of your yard, planters and flowerbeds.

Create a plan

Take care to plan your garden before you start buying flowers and shrubs. Because garden centers are so busy at this time of year, it's a good idea to bring along a sketch of what you want your garden to look like. Consider sunny and shady areas of your yard and decide where you want flowers, shrubs and vegetables to grow. Also be sure to think about a colour scheme, varying heights and widths of plants as well as blooming schedules. You don't want the whole show to take place in early spring or summer.

Your local garden center can help you choose a combination of perennials, shrubs and annuals that will provide continuous colour throughout the entire growing season and into the fall. Many will even provide landscape design services free of charge provided you purchase the plants from them.

When to start

Once you start seeing tulips and other spring bulbs come into bloom, the soil is usually warm enough to start digging. The ground should also be thawed enough to divide and move perennial flowers and herbs, plant shrubs and trees and to start rejuvenating your lawn. It's also a good time to prune bushes.

Spring gardening tips

Here's a few more tips to get your garden growing this spring – check with your local garden center for more advice:

- Prepare your flowerbeds by deeply digging the soil and adding composted manure. Loosen heavy clay soil by adding peat moss.
- Plant perennials now and enjoy them for years to come. Pay attention to different blooming times and plan for a sequence of colour all season long.
- Tidy up your spring bulbs by removing faded flowers. Don't cut down the leaves of your spring bulbs until the foliage turns brown. Bulbs need their leaves to replenish food reserves for next year's flowers.
- Plant summer flowering bulbs such as Freesia, Gladiolus, Dahlias, Lilies and Anemonies.
- Plant annuals and vegetables once all risk of frost has passed.

Your garden can actually become an extension of your living space – outdoors. A well-planned and maintained landscape will beautify your home and provide an oasis for the senses.

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