

## **Gardening Diary**

### **March 2010**

#### **MARCH**

After the worst winter weather for decades spring is definitely on the horizon. Thankfully soils and reservoirs have absorbed their maximum from snow and rains, so that's one blessing. And low temperatures have reduced over-wintering pest problems to a minimum, so plants should have a clean start to a new growing season. Despite the harsh winter, spring bulbs such as daffodils, snowdrops and crocus will be flowering at their normal time of year.

#### **THE ORNAMENTAL GARDEN**

With mild spells expected plants and weeds are ready to burst into new leaf and growth. Already you should be able to see small iris burst into blue, purple and mauve jewels and forsythia bushes clothed in their familiar, but nonetheless exciting bright yellow flowers. You will also notice that weeds are popping up to cover any bare soil. Instead of hand weeding you can kill off these weeds with a quick spray of Weedol Gun! Max in between flowers and shrubs and along the edges of the patio. On a warm sunny day you will see visible results in just a few hours.

Feeding is first priority in the ornamental parts of the garden as flowering shrubs, perennials and climbers start to throw out new stems and leaves. They need to draw on a reserve of balanced nutrients to produce strong healthy growth and plenty of flowering potential. Number one choice for flowering plants is a balanced feed that has been developed for flowers or roses. Miracle-Gro Rose Plus is a mini-granule that is clean and easy to apply and contains extra magnesium for healthy looking foliage. If you prefer to use an organic feed derived only from natural ingredients then Miracle-Gro Organic Choice All Purpose Plant Food is the one for you. It comes in a handy re-sealable pouch and contains a slow balanced mix of nutrients that are 100% chemical free. For best results with these two plant foods feed a couple of times during the year – once in early spring just as new growth is starting and again in early summer to encourage a second flowering period. If you just can't remember to do the second feed, then instead use a use a plant food such as Miracle-Gro Slow Release Rose & Shrub Plant Food. The controlled release granules gradually feed plants for up to 6 months using a patented technology used by professional growers to ensure plants grow twice as big as unfed ones.

Rhododendrons, Azaleas and other ericaceous plants such as heathers and pieris need to be fed with a special feed for acid-loving plants. Look out for the bright pink packs of Miracle-Gro Plant Foods that are marked clearly for "Azalea, Camellia & Rhododendrons". You can find Miracle-Gro water-soluble crystals in a carton, one in the Organic Choice family of pouches, one in Slow Release jars and even one in a bright yellow bottle that contains a Liquid Concentrate which is ideal for feeding acid-loving plants that are growing in pots or other patio containers.

Complete the pruning of bush roses with a sharp pair of secateurs. Take out any old or dead branches and cut back the remaining stems by at least a half of their length. Collect up all fallen leaves under the bushes, especially if these are marked with brown raggedy spots showing that rose blackspot has been affecting last year's growth. Don't put these diseased leaves on the compost heap but dispose of them at your local recycling plant. To protect the new foliage from the same disease it is important to spray your plants early in the year as the leaves unfurl and repeat this a couple of weeks later. These early sprays are vital to controlling existing spores that overwinter on the stems. Use up any stock you have in the garden shed of rose treatments such as RoseClear 3 and RoseClear 3 Gun!, or buy some fresh to use this spring.

After feeding and spraying, spread a mulch layer of Levington Water Saving Decorative Bark over the root area of your roses, shrubs and trees. This will help retain soil moisture at the roots and provide an attractive surface to the bed.

Pansies will produce many more flowers during spring if they are fed occasionally with Miracle-Gro Plant Food and the seed pods are removed after flowering. Pansies seem to be prone to greenfly and blackfly attack at this time of the year, perhaps because there are so few ladybirds around to control their numbers naturally. The BugClear Ultra Gun! is the chemical answer giving quick control that allows the plants to flower more abundantly. If you prefer a more organic solution try BugClear Gun! for Fruit & Veg which contains pyrethrins.

#### **TOPICAL TIP**

Snap off seed heads of daffodils and tulips after blooming has finished. A few feeds with Miracle-Gro All Purpose Plant Food applied over foliage and around roots will encourage strong build up of next years flower buds deep in the bulb.

#### **THE LAWN**

Mow the grass on a dry day setting the cutting blades high so that the shock is minimised. Check the lawn for moss, especially in shaded areas or low lying places where ever-wet soil will encourage its spread.

After a really wet winter that washed through most nutrients from soil, most lawns will benefit from a nitrogen plant food tonic that will help the grass plants to green up, encourage the lawn to thicken up and generally spring into action. There are plenty to choose from.

If moss is present, use a lawn fertilizer that contains ferrous sulphate mosskiller. For excellent results use Scotts Lawn Builder plus Moss Control for a richer greener lawn and effective moss control. After a couple of weeks the moss will have turned brown and can be raked up.

Broad-leaved weeds are not normally a great problem this early in the season but if dandelions, daisies and the like are harming the look of your lawn, apply one of the lawn foods mentioned above and then apply Verdone Extra in April about 3 weeks after the fertilizer has been applied.

## **THE VEGETABLE AND FRUIT GARDEN**

Outside prepare the ground and sow parsnips, carrots, turnips, summer cabbage and broad beans. It's also time to plant onion sets ready to grow into huge onions by the end of the summer.

The soil for root vegetables is best left without the addition of organic matter or manure as this can encourage forking of the main root. But for all other crops you will improve the soil and its fertility by digging in a layer of Miracle-Gro Gro Your Own Soil Improver. It's ideal for improving the water-holding capacity and structure of all soils. When raked into the top few inches of soil it will help to create a fine crumb structure that will encourage much better germination and subsequent growth of all seeds and seedlings.

All soils for all crops will benefit from a dressing of fertilizer raked into the surface, especially if those nutrients are derived from naturally occurring materials. Miracle-Gro Gro Your Own Fruit & Vegetable Plant Food fits that bill and promises to help you grow more fruit and more vegetables – guaranteed! A dressing before sowing seeds or planting out seedlings will get them all growing away quickly and another dressing a couple of months later will feed them through to harvest.

Towards the end of March sow first early potatoes that have been sprouting on a light windowsill. Sow the potato seed about 15cm (6in) deep in a trench that has been improved with Levington Farmyard Manure or Gro Your Own Soil Improver. Once they are planted leave the soil surface flat. You will be able to draw soil over emerging shoots after they have emerged. These ridges of soil are created to protect the foliage whenever frost is forecast in April or May.

Annual weeds and grasses will be emerging at the same time as fruit trees, bushes and canes burst into growth. To reduce the competition without disturbing the often shallow rooted fruit canes use Weedol Max or the ready to use Weedol Gun! Max to kill these nuisance weeds. These handy weedkillers are fast-acting and will show you visible results in double-quick time – in bright sunny conditions you can often see the leaves wilt and turn pale in just one hour.

Fruit trees, bushes and canes will grow better and produce a bigger crop if they also receive a long-lasting feed at the beginning of the growing season. Just one application of Miracle-Gro Slow Release All Purpose Plant Food will keep on feeding for up to six months, steadily releasing nutrients throughout that time whenever the soil is warm and the plants are actively growing. Each granule

contains balanced major nutrients with magnesium and trace elements, so your fruit will never run short of any element needed for strong healthy growth.

After feeding established fruiting plants cover the root area with a mulch layer of organic matter. Even the best well rotted garden compost seems to spread weed seeds, which is why tidy gardeners prefer to use a sterile material like Levington Water Saving Decorative Bark or Miracle-Gro Moisture Control Natural Pine Bark. These mulch layers not only look good but also hold in soil moisture and help to prevent more weed growth.

### **TOPICAL TIP**

Slugs and snails are on the rampage again. To protect new foliage from attack either scatter SlugClear Advanced Pellets thinly around vulnerable plants or water the plants and surrounding soil with SlugClear Liquid Concentrate. Many owners of inquisitive dogs prefer to use the liquid method as it leaves no bait visible on the ground.

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### **ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY**

BugClear™ Gun!™ for Fruit & Veg contains pyrethrins. BugClear™ Ultra Gun!™ contains acetamiprid. Scotts® Lawn Builder™ plus Moss Control contain ferrous sulphate. RoseClear® 3 contains bifenthrin and myclobutanil. RoseClear® 3 Gun!™ contains bifenthrin and myclobutanil. SlugClear™ and SlugClear™ Advanced Pellets contain metaldehyde. Verdone® Extra contains fluroxypyr, clopyralid and MCPA. Weedol® Max® and Weedol® Gun!™ Max® contain pelargonic acid. Weedol® Rootkill Plus™ contains glyphosate and pyraflufen ethyl.

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