

Home/Garden



Recorder/Chuck Blake

Parsnip season.

Today's weather notwithstanding, spring is the time to dig up last year's parsnips for real sweetness.

Garden Calendar

This information is provided by the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension.

Now is the time to:

- If renovating your landscape or changing the grade, be careful not to push soil around trunks of trees and shrubs. Doing so can cause suffocation and eventual death of the plants.

- Plant trees and shrubs. For a showy spring display of blossoms, crabapples have always been a favorite. The variety, "Narragansett" has great disease resistance and would make an excellent choice for a

new planting.

- Cut back hard the stems of sage before new growth begins. It is an easy to grow and useful culinary herb that would thrive in the gravelly soils of a rock garden.

- Plant "Norland" for an early maturing potato with a red skin. This variety produces medium size tubers, is resistant to scab disease and is excellent for harvest as "new potatoes."

- Dig up sections of lawn beneath shade trees and replace the grass with a mulch or shade tolerant

ground cover e.g. pachysandra or myrtle. Ground covers or mulches will look better than thinned out grass and will keep reckless lawn mower jockies from banging into tree trunks.

- Set out transplants of cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, onions and lettuce but be sure they have been hardened beforehand. Begin hardening plants a week to 10 days before transplanting to the garden by putting them outside during the day and returning them indoors at night.

Spring garden chores

The snow is off my garden, snowdrops and crocus are blooming, peony and bulb shoots are reaching for the sun, and all kinds of things are poking up green in the perennial border. With all this activity it's hard to resist the urge to run out to the garden and start digging.

Don't.

My garden soil is still waterlogged. If I take a handful and squeeze it, I have a sticky mudball. Soil must be dry enough so that it will hold together, but not stick together, before it can be worked. Wait until a handful of soil will crumble after it has been released and tapped gently.

Digging and cultivating the garden before it's sufficiently dry can cause great damage to the soil structure. Walking in the garden while it's wet will compact the soil, stunting your plant's growth later in the season because the roots will not be able to develop and penetrate properly.

Wait.

While we wait to go out and dig, there are some things we can do.

General clean-up

First we can do some general clean-up. Rake up all the leaves, branches and litter that have blown into the yard over the winter — or that didn't quite get cleaned up last fall. Except for branches, most of this litter can go on the compost pile.

Start seedlings indoors. It's not too late. Eggplant and peppers need to be started as much as 10 or 12 weeks before the last frost, but tomatoes can be started 8 weeks before they are set out in the garden. Lettuce and cole crops, like broccoli, brussels sprouts and cauliflower, can be started 5 or 6 weeks early then put into the garden when the most severe weather is over, but nights are still cold.

Melons have a long growing season and must be set out after the weather is warm and very settled, but they can't be started more than a month ahead. Melons are particularly vulnerable to transplanting shock, so it's best to start them in their own peat pots or Jiffy pots which can be popped right into a planting hole outside.

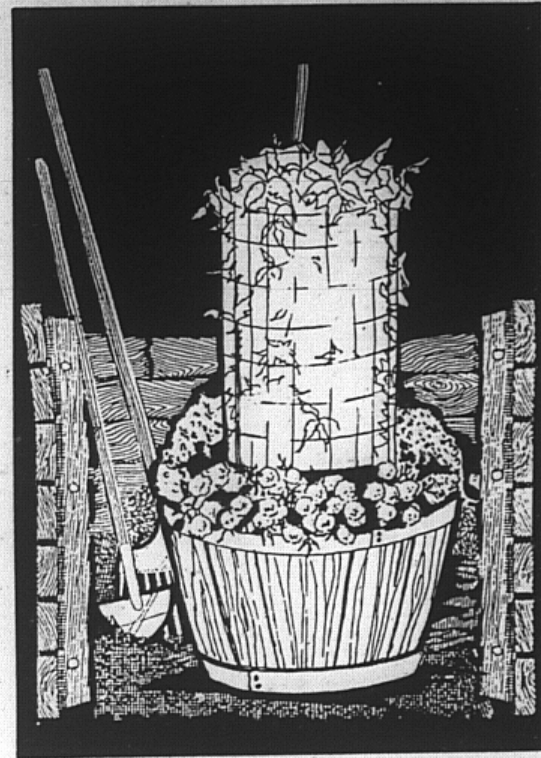
Check tools and supplies

Check your tools. Sometimes I don't even know where mine all are. Are they clean or rusty? Do blades need to be sharpened? Are handles smooth or splintery. It's time to take inventory, get them ready for the season and maybe find a new, organized way to store them. It's this time of the year that I always hear my father's voice, "A place for everything and everything in its place."

- Assemble miscellaneous equipment and supplies. Do you have a supply of pea strings, row markers, labels and anything else that you routinely use, but also routinely find you have forgotten on that first exciting planting day?

Build. This is the perfect time to build tomato cages, or cucumber and melon trellises.

Or it's the perfect time to take another stroll through the garden cata-



Pat Leuchtman

Between The Rows



Digging and cultivating the garden before it's sufficiently dry can cause great damage to the soil structure. Walking in the garden while it's wet will compact the soil, stunting your plant's growth later in the season.

log or nursery, and buy this kind of equipment that will save space and make the harvest easier.

Make a garden plan. Rotating your crops is an important way to manage your soil's fertility and discourage disease. To do this properly you'll need a garden map that you can keep and refer to next spring.

I'm a believer in companion planting, but I still have trouble remembering whether the beans should be planted with onions — or away from the onions. By taking my carefully planned garden map out with me on planting day, I don't waste time, and I can confidently plant beets with the onions — and keep both of them far away from the pole beans.

There are those who are firm believers in planting according to the phases of the moon. Generally speaking, they say plants that produce their crops above the ground should be planted when the moon is waxing (increasing). Crops that are harvested from below the ground should be planted when the moon is

waning (decreasing).

However, Ed Hume says there are lots of other things that are best done at certain phases of the moon — fertilizing, weeding, harvesting and more.

To make this complicated system easier, Hume offers a booklet: 1988 Moon Sign Gardening Dates. To order a copy send \$1.25 to Moon Book, P.O. Box 1450, Kent, WA 98035 along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Celebrate.