

The Dirt on Hill Country Gardening

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Spring Is Just around the Corner!

The weather is acting more like spring than winter, so we might just as well start looking forward to spring. Those who want to create a new bed, it is time to make a plan, mark off the area, draw the plan to scale, put your plants on the plan with their eventual size shown, and then start getting the beds ready.

Those who want to change or enhance existing beds should follow the same process, showing existing plants on the plan, and penciling in planned plants.

To prepare the areas for spring planting, now is the time to add Medina Soil Activator and agricultural molasses to loosen up existing soils, feed and stimulate the soil organisms, and generally enrich your soil. Compost can be added as a top dressing or forked into the soil. The top dressing will end up getting turned under as you plant your spring plants, and it holds water and leeches a compost tea into the soil subsurface, making it richer in the meantime.

If your plan includes some transplanting, now is the best time to do it. Yesterday was better, and tomorrow will not be quite as good. The more time a plant has to acclimate after transplanting before it goes into an active growing period, the better. Be sure to keep transplants watered with the dry weather we're having.

If you're planting in an area that has had lots of weeds, spear corn gluten meal as a pre-emergent to keep them from sprouting from seed.

Spend the rest of your planning time deciding what to plant where, and this can be done with catalogs, local nurserymen, books, and all over the Internet...the fun part. Time spent planning and preparing is your most important time. Your ultimate plan will be realized in a few short years, but it takes patience.

Plant of the Week. Blue Potato Vine *Solanum crispum* and White Potato Vine *Solanum jasminoides*. These vines scarcely looks like potato vines, but are indeed cousins to the kitchen potato (*S. tuberosum*). They're not exactly vines, but more "wall shrubs." These get round & bushy and can use some annual trimming back to a wall to retain a vining appearance. The blooms are clusters of drooping flowers, and these plants bloom profusely throughout the summer until frost. These are evergreen unless we have a truly killing frost, and they are definitely underutilized.

Chores for this week.

- Spread a pre-emergent, such as corn gluten meal.

- Plan your new or modified beds for spring.
- Use soil conditioners and molasses and compost on planned bed areas.

We encourage your questions, comments, or your own "Personal Plant of the Week" by writing David at dsteiny@ktc.com.