

The Dirt on Hill Country Gardening

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Spring is just around the corner...

The average frost date is only a week away. Now we'll be able to actually start doing spring chores. These include fertilizing everything with a good, slow-release, organic fertilizer. Any chemical fertilizer will act too fast and cause more problems than it solves if we get another dip on the thermometer. Besides, the organic fertilizers are much more efficient for a longer period of time.

If you haven't already, prune your roses as they are already starting new growth. On a trip to Uvalde, we noted that the roses were already blooming as well as the Texas Mountain Laurels.

Prune your ornamental grasses, such as muhly, miscanthus, pennisetum, pampas grass, fountain grass, etc. Trim your salvia greggii plants. Remove all the dead branches from the Mexican sage, mealy sage, indigo spires, and any other plants that have died back to the root system. Finish any tree trimming or transplanting within the next week or two. Get any trees or fruit trees planted as soon as possible.

Start spraying weeds as they appear with 20% vinegar while the is bright for best results. Treat with nematodes for any insects that overwinter in the ground. This includes fire ants, leaf rollers, June buds, fleas, grubs, root-knot nematodes, etc.

If you haven't already, clean out your Martin Houses for the returning birds. Clean up the debris that has overwintered here and there and add to your compost. You can dig some trenches in your flower beds and fill them with debris if you don't have a

Spend time enjoying the daffodils, hyacinths, and ranunculas that are already blooming, and watch for everything else to start growing and blooming in earnest.

Plant of the week. Magnolia vine (*Schisandra propinqua* var. *sinesis*) can grow as a groundcover or a climbing vine that will reach 30 feet. It has beautiful, glossy green leaves that are 2 to 3 inches long, and it have beautiful yellow racemes, dripping with blooms. The cluster of blooms turn to translucent red fruit in the fall.

Chores for this week. - Most of these are preventative medicine. You'll be glad you did them when everything pops into bloom in the spring!

- Spray with a dormant oil on your roses, fruit trees, oak trees, or any trees that tend to get scale or have overwintering insects. Add a bit of Neem oil, which is an organic insecticide, to your spray.
- We're approaching the last period of time to plant bare-root trees, roses, or shrubs.
- Keep killing thistles with 20% vinegar solution applied on a sunny day before they grow too much.
- 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.