

FEBRUARY

February can be one of the most important work months of the year and could even be referred to as the Pruning, Mulching and Cleanup Month. Even on the coldest days, if the sun is shining, do not forget to slightly ventilate cold frames and greenhouses. The sun's energy can quickly heat up such enclosures and "cook" your plants.

- In warm winters with early springs, do not be tempted to fertilize plants during brief warm spells. It will only encourage new growth which may die when temperatures drop again.
- Watch out for late frosts. Avoid working wet soil. Squeeze a fistful of soil together. If the soil stays packed in a ball, it's too wet to maintain good tilth (soil cultivation). Be patient. Wait. Spring is coming!

Lawns

- An earth-friendly way to deal with Wild Onions in the lawn is to simply dig them out. Now is a good time to do the job. If you wait until after a good rain, many of the onions can be hand-pulled out of the ground. Try not to leave any of the onion or its seedling parts in the ground.
- Do not fertilize lawns this month. Do not use weed and feed. Warm season grasses are still dormant and do not need feeding until 2 to 3 weeks after green-up, around the end of May, beginning of June.
- Do not burn your lawn. It will not destroy the weeds and may damage many types of lawn and shallow-rooted plants.
- Remove leaves and debris that may have fallen on lawns. These projects will be easier if you do not have to continually stop and cleanup.
- Cool season lawn weeds are at their most vigorous stage now. Control them before they begin producing seed by hand-pulling or using an appropriate post-emergent herbicide.

- Apply pre-emergent herbicide for warm weather lawn weeds. Check labels to make sure the product will work on your type of grass. Apply a second application in six weeks. Note: Centipede grass and Bermuda grass require different products.
- Prepare for spring lawn care by servicing the lawn mower. This includes an oil change, lubrication, cleaning, sharpening the blade and adjusting the cutting height for your kind of grass. Consult your owner's manual for specific recommendations.
- Finish raking leaves out of the landscape areas. Oak leaves may continue falling through March.
- Spot treat any broadleaf weeds.
- Add more mulch. Pine needles, pine bark, compost or hardwood bark are aesthetically pleasing and functional.
- Consider if you need to re-edge the beds. Either prune or enlarge the bed. Leave about 12 to 18 inches of mulched space between the turf and plants in the bed. Re-edging and re-mulching should be a management activity done twice a year.
- Do not turn on the sprinkler system and water the lawn because it is still dormant.

Trees and Shrubs

- Transplant shrubs such as Azaleas and check for Lacebugs on Azalea and Pyracantha.
- Pick up old Camellia flowers that have fallen and remove them from your property. This will help to reduce the incidence of Flower Blight in the spring.
- Plant trees and shrubs while they are dormant, if you did not already do so last fall.

- Cut branches of Cherry, Dogwood, Forsythia, Pussy Willow, Quince, Redbud and Spirea, and other spring bloomers for forcing indoors.

Pruning Trees and Shrubs

- There are several basic reasons to prune ornamentals:
 - keep dead, dying, damaged, wood and broken branches pruned
 - a plant may have gotten too large for the intended space
 - a plant may have been grown for a particular shape
 - some plants may need renovation.
- There are three pruning tools which all home gardeners and landscape professionals should have:
 1. a pair of hand pruners with scissor action, often called bypass pruners
 2. a pair of loppers with the ability to cut 2 inch branches
 3. a pruning saw
- When pruning, disinfect the blades with alcohol between cuts to prevent the spread of diseases
- Hand shears should always be sharp and rust free. Use standard solvents to clean the blades.
- Pruning loppers with steel handles about 3 feet long give you excellent leverage and the handles will not crack.
- The bow saw is a safe way to trim larger branches.
- A chain saw works faster, but an accident is no way to welcome the spring. Nicks and ragged or damaged ends often result.
- Most horticulturists agree that late winter and early spring are the best times to prune. Timing is the key factor for successful results. Note: when pruning fruit trees, prune before bud break.
- Do not prune spring flowering shrubs until after they have finished flowering. Examples are: Azalea, Barberry, Blueberry, Bush Honeysuckle, Camellia, Cotoneaster, Dogwood, Euonymus,

Forsythia, Magnolia, Quince, Spirea, Styrax, Viburnum, Winter Jasmine, and other early spring-flowering shrubs.

The following is a partial list of plants that are best pruned in February (late winter/early spring):

1. Abelia - *Abelia x grandiflora* - (glossy abelia)
2. Buddleia - *Buddleja davidii* - (butterfly bush)
3. Callicarpa - *Callicarpa dichotoma* - (purple beautyberry)
4. Chaste-tree - *Vitex agnus - castus*
5. Crape Myrtle - *Lager stroemia indica*
6. Hibiscus - *Hibiscus syriacus* - (Rose-of-Sharon)
7. Hollies - *ilex*
8. Roses - *Rosa sp.* (hybrid rose)
9. Hypericum - *Hypericum sp.* - (aaron's beard hypericum)
10. Junipers - *Juniperus*
11. Ligustrum - *Ligustrum*
12. Nandina - *Nandina domestica*
13. Photinia - *Photinia*
14. Wax Myrtle - *Myrica cerifera*

- Instead of pruning a plant by trimming everything at the top, consider removing some of the lower branches all the way to the ground. Tree-form plants will require less attention and effort over the years.
- For a complete guide to pruning go to the NC State link:
[www. http://brunswick.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Newcomer-Packet.pdf?fw=no](http://brunswick.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Newcomer-Packet.pdf?fw=no)

Ornamental Grasses

- The tops of ornamental grasses are still helping make the winter landscape interesting, but it is time to cut them back.
- Japanese Blood grass, Miscanthus, Northern Sea oats, Pampas Grass, and Pennisetum species are candidates for hedge shears or a machete.
- Liriope and Mondo Grass may be trimmed by raising the mowing height on your mower or using a string trimmer to cut the tops off. Do not cut down into the crown of the plants.

Flowers

- If you have not removed spent flower blossoms or deadheaded them, now is a good time. Some examples are Cone Flower and Black-eyed Susan.
- Divide perennials such as Ajuga, Aster, Coreopsis, Daylily, Hosta and Phlox.
- Start warm season annuals inside, such as Coleus, Marigolds, Salvia and Zinnias.
- Check stored bulbs, tubers and corms for signs of rot.
- Continue feeding and watering pansies and fertilize bulbs when growth appears.
- Prepare annual beds for spring planting. Incorporate generous amounts of organic amendments such as peat, compost or manure. If fresh material is used, wait at least 3 weeks following the application before seeding or setting out bedding plants.
- Keep outside container plants well watered, especially during a cold snap.

Roses

- Prune Floribunda roses, Grandiflora, and Hybrid Tea. Remove all dead and weak wood.
- Thin Climbing Roses by removing older canes.

Fruits and Vegetables

- Spray fruit trees and woody ornamental shrubs with a solution of horticultural oil emulsion. This is a relatively non-toxic way of controlling over-wintering Mites, Scales, and other pests.
- Finish pruning fruit trees and grapevines.

- The easiest fruits to grow in our area are Strawberries, Blueberries, Muscadines, Blackberries, Figs and Persimmons. Peaches are the most challenging. Cherries and Apricots will not grow here.
- Plant local varieties of Blueberries. Blueberries like acidic soil. Take soil samples to determine Ph. For more information on Blueberries visit www.blueberries.ces.ncsu.edu.
- Prune Apple, Pear and Peach trees. Plums and Figs require little annual pruning.
- Prune Blackberry laterals (side branches) so they are 12-14 inches long. Cut out dead, broken or weak canes.
- If the soil is dry enough, till and turn the soil to a depth of one foot. Incorporate organic matter - humus, compost, manure. Turn over any cover crop. Amend according to the soil report.
- Start Eggplant, Pepper and Tomato seeds indoors in containers for transplanting into the garden during late March and early April. Frost may occur up to April 15th in some parts of Coastal North Carolina. You may have to protect the new plants, if necessary.
- Start cool season vegetables: plant seeds of Arugula, Beets, Carrots, Collards, Endive, English Peas, Escarole, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leek, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Parsley, Radish, Spinach and Turnips.
- Onion sets can be planted in the garden in February for harvest in June.
- Establish Irish Potatoes by planting 2-ounce seed pieces with eyes.