

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson

Paperwhites have been producing bountiful displays of scented flowers since mid-January. Paperwhites grow from bulbs and are commonly seen growing in vacant lots.

The first day of spring will soon be here (March 20 at 5:28 a.m.) according to the astronomical definition. From a gardening perspective, the exact timing of "spring" is less precise.

This has been an unusually mild winter. That's not necessarily a hard science meteorological assessment just my horticultural opinion.

Arizona ash trees serve as my harbinger for

spring. I've observed over many years that Arizona ash trees will start setting out new leaves around February 20, give or take a few days. I noticed on an evening walk on January 21 that several trees had started new growth. Even azaleas are a bit ahead of schedule in being in full flower.

We should remember that arrival of the spring season along the

Texas Gulf Coast tends to have a bumpy landing. Mother Nature has been known to deliver a surprise cold snap during this time of year.

Review the following gardening checklist for things to do as the spring season arrives.

Gulf Coast Herb Festival: The Friends of Moody Gardens will host the Fifth Annual Gulf Coast Herb Festi-



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Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

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val on Wednesday, March 1, from 9 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the atrium of the Moody Gardens Visitor Center located at One Hope Boulevard in Galveston.

A variety of vendors will be on hand showcasing their herbs, books, food items and gifts. The Herb Fair will also feature cooking demonstrations. Master Gardeners will also be available to answer questions on growing and using herbs.

Tickets for a luncheon at 12:00 Noon can be purchased at the Herb Fair on Wednesday.

Proceeds from this event benefit third graders across Galveston schools with an educational experience at the Aquarium Pyramid and fifth graders at Galveston schools with an educational experience at the Rainforest Pyramid.

ANNUALS: Copper plants, ageratum and ornamental amaranth and other annuals can be set out.

FERTILIZE LANDSCAPE

TREES AND SHRUBS: March is an excellent time to fertilize established landscape trees and shrubs as they come out of their winter dormancy period and put out new growth. It is not necessary to punch holes in the ground to fertilize trees or shrubs or to use fertilizer spikes. Surface application of a granular fertilizer is quite satisfactory and an even better

practice.

VEGETABLES: Many types of vegetables can usually be established in the garden during March including transplants of tomatoes and peppers as well as direct-seeding of corn, cucumbers, southern peas and many other vegetables.

Be prepared to provide cold weather protection as may be needed. It is still too early to plant okra as okra does not tolerate cool spells. Wait until mid-April before planting okra seeds.

LAWNS: Yes, most area St. Augustine lawns are dull brown in color because of our on-and-off periods of cool weather conditions. However, do not fertilize St. Augustine lawns now in the hope of making it green up faster. St. Augustine lawns should not be fertilized this time of year until after the grass starts to actively grow; otherwise, if you fertilize now you will be benefiting winter weeds and some of the nitrogen will be lost before lawn growth starts.

HANGING BASKETS: Late March is an ideal time to set out hanging baskets. The variety of plants that can be used is limited only by your imagination. Suitable plants for hanging baskets include portulaca, ivy, geraniums, airplane plant, bougainvillea, English ivy, begonias, and a host of others.

REPOT HOUSEPLANTS: It's an excellent time to repot houseplants. Gently knock the plant out of the pot and inspect the root system. If the roots are crowded and matted on the exterior portion of the root ball, put the plant in a larger pot.

CAMELLIAS AND AZALEAS: As camellia and azalea plants finish blooming, fertilize them with an azalea-camellia fertilizer according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

WEED KILLERS AND TREES: Many landscape trees and shrubs are damaged or killed each year by the careless application of weed killers to lawns, including those found in mixes of weed killers and fertilizers (commonly called "weed & feed"). Always read and follow all label directions very carefully including application near the drip line of landscape trees and shrubs.

PANSIES: If pansies look unthrifty, apply a light application of fertilizer. Use one pound of 13-13-13 or similar fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed area. Repeat the application every 4 to 6 weeks. Dried blood meal and cottonseed meal (3 to 4 pounds per 100 square feet of bed) are also excellent types of slow-release fertilizer for pansies.

