

Think Green with Lawncare

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With winter now in the rearview mirror the time has come to prepare our lawns for the spring and summer seasons. It's time to once again mow the yard, fertilize it, revamp the landscaping, among many other things but have you ever considered on caring for your lawn in an environmentally friendly way that will benefit you and nature? Many of the methods described in this week's column are relatively easy to implement not taking too much time on your part. We will also look at things to consider following winter.

More than likely, there are many yard cleanup tasks that you already do each season. Make sure to trim any branches on your trees and shrubs that died off over the winter months to allow the plant to have space to new growth to take place. Do the same with your perennial plants that have any dieback throughout the winter and be sure to take care of those annual flowers by pulling them up. If you have a compost pile, that would be a great place for those old annual plant species! While the month may have already passed, Landscape Contractor with *This Old House* Roger Cook says that March is always the prime time to take an inventory of your home lawn to see if the time has come to make room in crowded flower beds or if you have some open spots that could be filled with transplants.

This Old House provides some things to make sure are included on your spring-cleaning checklist. First is trimming back any decayed branches from the winter months. According to *This Old House*, be sure to trim back the dead limbs and branches to the point you reach a live stem and that you should use hand pruners instead of electric trimmers as this will allow for sunlight and oxygen to reach through to the center of the shrub allowing it to adequately grow. It is also advised to trim the evergreen trees you have to the direction you wish for it to grow.

Don't forget about those grasses and other perennials in your yard. For the flowering perennials, *This Old House* recommends trimming to a height of around four to five inches while you should go with around two to three inches for the ornamental grasses and then digging up the perennials and splitting them up to thin out crowded beds and fill in any areas that may need some cover. When splitting the perennial grasses, it is recommended to have at least three stems in each clump.

Another consideration to make is cleaning up debris from around your landscaping. Make sure to rake out any leaves or other plant debris that may be lining your landscaping bed. Leaving this type of material in your landscaping and even your garden will provide the right conditions for many diseases to crop up that

could prove damaging or fatal to the plants you are trying to take care of. Roger Cook says to remove any mulch from the previous year, given temperatures have warmed up enough that frost is not an issue, and put in a new layer once you are done with your new spring planting.

When considering some planting for the spring give “Green Landscaping” a try. What is this you ask? According to Better Homes & Gardens (BHG), this concept otherwise known as eco-landscaping is a technique that is used to “design, create, and maintain your landscape to save time, money, and energy”. This technique also seeks to provide habitat for wildlife while leading to less pollution of the air, soil, and water. One thing that BHG recommends is to think native when choosing your plant species because they are already adjusted to the climatic conditions of the regional area and to stay local when buying species because even if a species is from the United States it does not automatically mean that it will grow in your area. The key is to make sure a species is not invasive and will easily overtake the area it is growing in.

Rather than building an artificial fence, BHG suggests utilizing a living fence by planting deciduous trees on the southern and western edges of your yard which will help to provide a cool shade area in the summer and a warming area in the winter months. An added benefit of the living fence is that wildlife will enjoy the nice habitat you have provided for them as well. You will like the aesthetics of the living fence and wildlife will like the food and habitat!

Are you ready to go out and work in your yard yet? As you can see, there are many things to consider when transforming your yard from its winter rest to a nice vibrant landscape for the upcoming season. In doing these preparations, the environment can be kept in mind by utilizing some “Green Landscaping” techniques. With these tips in mind, your lawn and landscaping will be ready for the season ahead!