



A New Year, a New Garden: Your Late Winter Growing Guide

By: Nikki Way & Nicole Molinaro ~ GROW Commissioners

Starting your garden preparation now will keep you on track for a great growing year. Below are a few key reminders of what gardening and landscaping actions can be taken in late winter/early spring to ensure you have a strong start that aligns with your growing plans.

February

- **Last Call before Fall:** Removing buckthorn now provides your natives the opportunity for healthier soil to thrive in. You can help stop the spread of invasive species by visiting <https://fpdcc.com/volunteer/ecological-stewardship-workdays/> to learn about local volunteer events. Feb 26th begins National Invasive Species Week and year-long educational opportunities on the invasive buckthorn.
- **Garden Inventory and Planning:** Take stock of your existing native plants. Resist urge to remove dead branches or debris until mid-late April. Assess the need for new mulch and division of plants. Sketch out your garden layout, incorporating new plant additions that take into consideration light, soil, and spacing needs. (<https://xerces.org/blog/dont-spring-into-garden-cleanup-too-soon>)
- **Seed Spree:** While the ground remains frozen, your indoor haven can become a seedling nursery. Remember to research specific germination requirements and provide adequate light and warmth. (For more specifics on seed sowing and gardening, check out the Grassroots Garden Group at <https://www.grassrootsgardengroup.org/>)
- **Tool Tune-Up:** Sharpen pruners, clean trowels, and oil shears. Prepare for the busy season ahead by ensuring your gardening tools are in top condition.
- **Fun activity:** In late February/early March you can force blooms from branches of apple and crabapple, flowering cherry, flowering quince, forsythia, magnolia, redbud, serviceberry, and spring-flowering witch hazel. (For more details visit: <https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantinfo/checklist/february>)

March

- **Watch out for native plant sales:** Most local nurseries and groups will have ordering deadlines many weeks prior to their sale dates - particularly if you have a plan and certain desired plants.
- **Plant trees and shrubs:** March is the ideal time to plant new trees and shrubs before they begin to bud. You can get a Parkway Tree through the 50/50 Tree program, where the village will split the cost of a new parkway tree of your choice on list. If you are interested in the 50/50 program, contact the Westchester Public Works department at (708)-345-0041.
- **Prune woody plants:** with sharp shears or a chainsaw, remove the following from your trees: dead, diseased, crossing, or rubbing branches anytime, including water sprouts and suckers. (<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/garden-calendar/#midwinter-to-early-spring>)

April

- **Test soil pH:** Use a pH meter and fertilize based on soil need. Add compost around trees, in garden, and in lawn bare spots with grass seed. Adding microbes to your soil helps plants get the nutrients they need.
- **Suppress weeds with corn gluten:** Corn gluten is a great natural way to suppress weeds. Apply it in April before the Forsythia bloom, and maintain application monthly to mitigate weeds throughout your garden season. (<https://midwestgrowsgreen.org/what-you-can-do/all-resources/>)
- **Hold off on transplanting:** Fake spring happens in April, so don't be fooled - best practice is to not transplant your plants to their garden until May 11th.
- **Hold off on clean up:** While it is tempting to clean up your garden, wait until the temperature is over 50 degrees for a few days to give critters a chance to emerge. You can pile your yard clutter in one corner of your garden if you can't wait. The longer you can tolerate your messy garden, the more beneficial insects have a chance to emerge and do their important work.

Get Involved!



2024 GROW Meeting Dates: We usually meet 1st Thursday of the month at 6:30 PM (*unless noted) in the board room of village hall. Upcoming Meetings; Feb 1, March 7

There are many ways to participate in GROW activities:

1. **Attend GROW events:** we host a number of events, workshops, and giveaways each year, promote them in the newsletter as well as the Westchester website, and email blast.
2. **Share your ideas and concerns at our monthly meeting:** Help us make Westchester a greener and more sustainable community. We meet monthly at village hall – meeting dates are listed here and on the village website.
3. **Become a GROW Commissioner:** We recruiting to fill a 3-year term open beginning February 2024. Candidates should have ability and availability to participate in commission meetings, events, and contribute to the Village newsletter. Relevant knowledge, education, or experience is helpful, but not required. Key to the commission being able to educate and engage residents for action on environmental issues/practices. Westchester residents 21 or older are welcome to apply. *To apply, submit a copy of your resume/bio along with a cover letter/statement about your background and interests to: Evie Slavic - eslavic@westchester-il.gov*
4. Read GROW agendas, meeting minutes, reports on the village website <https://www.westchester-il.org/>.