

Basic Spring Landscape Maintenance

The winds of winter still chill our air as northern Nevada prepares for spring. A flourish of spring color can be seen with forsythia in full bloom, daffodils and tulips popping up and our flowering pear, plum, cherry and crabapple trees not far behind. To get the most out of your landscape this growing season, spend some time now doing easy and basic maintenance on your existing lawn, trees and shrubs by preparing your planter beds and installing new plants.

To start, perennials should be waking and well on their way to making themselves seen, slowly emerging through the mulch placed as a protector in the fall. To ensure your plants continue to mature move the mulch away from the rising plants, allowing them to breathe. Add new mulch around the base of the plants. This will allow the new growth to spread and breathe while suppressing weed growth in the surrounding bed. Organic mulch (shredded bark, compost, Gromulch, etc.) will provide additional benefits to the soil -- improving its structure and nutrient level as well as increasing its moisture retention.

Now's a good time feed your perennials with a slow release plant food like Osmocote or Miracle Gro Shake n Feed. If your plants have had insect problems in the past, then a plant food with a systemic insecticide like Bayer Rose & Flower Care would be a good choice.

If your landscape is new (less than 5 years old) you will want to consider using a fertilizer to ensure the best growth for the season. Newly planted shrubs, lawns, perennials and annuals will need nutrients to help establish their roots in the soil. (Trees can be fertilized after they've been in the ground for a year.) Select a balanced, slow release fertilizer to ensure that the nutrients are gradually released and made available to the plants. Evergreen trees and shrubs, hydrangeas, rhododendrons and dogwood trees usually require a fertilizer formulated for acid loving plants while most deciduous trees and shrubs will do best with a balanced fertilizer.

Given our soil's notorious lack of nutrients, even well-established landscapes may need to be fertilized. And if your trees and shrubs have had insect or disease problems in the past, you'll want to treat them now with an appropriate product. Examine their growth habits to decide if fertilizer will enhance your plants' performance. Trees and shrubs that don't show sufficient growth or have small leaf development may need a shot of nutrients. Be sure to read the product directions when applying your fertilizer; it's important to apply the right amount at the right time of year. Too much fertilizer and applying it at the wrong time of the year will be harmful.

Along with our trees, shrubs and perennials, our lawns need spring attention, too. After this past long, wet winter, you can start preparing your yard by raking it to remove any thatch build-up that has developed. After this is done you can aerate your lawn to help prevent future thatch build-up and allow water and nutrients to penetrate the soil and reach the roots.

Now it's time to nourish your lawn by applying a slow release fertilizer. Choose a balanced fertilizer with a good ratio of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Too much nitrogen will give you a flush of green but is not good for over all health of your lawn. If there are weeds in your lawn, you should choose a fertilizer like Scotts Super Turf Builder Plus 2. You'll probably want to apply two applications of fertilizer before the hot summer months. Follow the instructions on the label for best results.

Along with your plants and lawn you should take time now to tune up your lawn mower and tools for the coming season's maintenance. After sitting in your garage or shed all winter many mowers need some maintenance to get them up and going. A sharp blade on your mower is essential to keeping your lawn green and healthy as the temperatures climb. Pruners, loppers, shovels and other tools may need to be sharpened or replaced. Taking care of your tools now means they'll be ready when you need them. This is also a good time to check out hoses and nozzles; if they're leaky, gaskets should be replaced.

Now is the time to turn on your irrigation system and inspect it for leaks, broken/clogged heads, coverage and other problems. If you've experienced large water bills in previous years, this would be an excellent time to contact a certified irrigation specialist to conduct an audit and tune-up your system. It is also important to check the drip emitters (those placed around trees and shrubs); as trees and shrubs grow, their root systems expand and the emitters should be moved farther away from the trunk so that the entire root zone gets watered.

To get the best advice and more information on all of the above, visit a local independent garden center where you'll find knowledgeable employees who have experience in gardening in our difficult conditions.

The cool, comfortable temperatures of the spring season are almost gone and summer is creeping up on us. Make the most of this spring time and put some effort into your landscape now so you can enjoy it through the season. Pampering your landscape in the mild, comfortable days ahead will leave you with a lower maintenance, better looking, and healthy landscape for the summer months to come.