



## *Shaler Garden Club Horticultural Hints*

*May 2017*

- 1) N-P-K on fertilizer labels = **N**itrogen for foliage growth (coleus and sweet potato vines); **P**hosphorous for flowering and root development (tomatoes); and **K** Potassium which promotes all around plant growth.
- 2) Chives make a great plant for the perennial border that doubles as an herb.
- 3) To kill moss on sidewalks, use 1 part bleach to 5 parts water. Spray it on and let sit awhile, then rinse.
- 4) You can attract lots of pollinators to your garden with sweet alyssum. Its fragrance draws butterflies and bees on a sunny day.
- 5) Don't panic if your rose of Sharon looks dead in the spring. The leaves of this shrub are some of the last to emerge in late spring.

*Spring: A gardeners' Christmas morning.*

*~ ~ Anonymous*

### **May Gardening Events**

- 3 Spring Botany Walk & Talk at Pittsburgh Botanic Gardens -- 10:30am
  - 4 Bird Day
  - 7 Rock Garden Show at Soergel's Orchard
  - 11 New Member Tea at Leslie Anthony's house -- 1 pm
  - 12 National Public Gardens Day
  - 12 - 13 May Market at Phipps Conservatory
  - 13 International Bird Day
  - 13 Penn State Master Gardener Gardenfest at Laurie Ann West Community Center, Fox Chapel, PA -- 9am - 3pm
- June 3 Hosta Show at Soergel's Orchard -- 10am

**To-Do List for Zone 6**

- 1) Harden off annuals and vegetables for one to two weeks before planting outside. To do this, gradually increase exposure to sunlight, temperature changes, air movement and soil moisture variations by putting plants outside for a few hours a day, increasing the time over the two weeks.
- 2) Put out hummingbird feeders to welcome them back to the area for the season.
- 3) Plant annuals among waning spring bulbs in mid-May; be prepared to cover them on cold nights, especially if you plant earlier.
- 4) Plant tomatoes and peppers in the garden toward the end of the month.
- 5) Trim forsythias after they have bloomed to keep the bushes shapely.
- 6) Control weeds while they are small.
- 7) Apply dormant oil (i.e., Neem oil) to ornamental trees and shrubs which have a history of aphid, scale or spider mite infestations. Destroying these pests safely with spring applications of horticultural oil will reduce your need for pesticides later in the growing season.

**Tips to Keep Your Body Healthy as You Garden This Spring**

The warmer days of spring are right around the corner, giving gardeners renewed energy after the long days of winter. Whether you are digging a new bed, dividing perennials or planting trees and shrubs, spring is the perfect time of year to tackle such projects. But such physically demanding tasks can also put a strain on a gardener's body. Here are some tips to keep you healthy as you get down and dirty.

**Protect your back**

Lower back muscles are intended to keep us upright. They are postural muscles and are not designed to lift heavy loads. The thigh, calf and abdominal muscles are the primary movers for lifting. Your arms and back should act like pillars making a strong connection between the load to be lifted and the legs, as your thigh muscles lift the load. Lifting a 10-pound load can actually put 100 pounds of pressure on your lower back. Lifting heavy loads can strain your neck and shoulders as well as your lower back.

To lift safely, pivot your feet and don't twist your back. Push rather than pull, if possible. Keep items close to your body when lifting and carrying. Lift the

handles of a wheelbarrow at elbow height. Keep your stomach muscles firm while lifting and performing garden tasks.

Know your limits. Test the weight of the load before lifting. Lift smaller loads. Slide heavy bags to the edge of the car trunk and to a wheelbarrow then wheel to garage or site. Open large bags of soil or mulch and transfer to smaller containers.

Plan ahead and remove obstacles from your path.

When shoveling, keep hands widely separated for good leverage. Bend at the hips and knees, not the waist. Keep the shovel close to your body and use your legs to lift the load. Do not stand in one place, twist and throw the load. Instead, turn and step to keep your hips and shoulders moving in the same direction.

Other risk factors associated with back injuries include prolonged or awkward postures, including bending and twisting. Prolonged generally means a position held more than 10 minutes. Avoid prolonged bending over; it fatigues the lower back muscles. Instead, bend your knees, squat, or half kneel and switch legs often. Sit on a bench. Half lunge forward, making sure your knee does not go past your ankle, using your back leg for balance. Avoid prolonged kneeling; it's also hard on your knees and hamstrings. After kneeling, stand and stretch your legs and back.

#### Use the right tool for the task

Hand trowels are perfect for planting smaller perennials, but reach for a spade or digging fork when tackling established plants.

Pruning is a major spring chore. Many gardeners are guilty of using what's at hand to prune, often selecting a tool too small for the cut they're making. Hand pruners should be used for branches up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in diameter. Loppers give gardeners increased reach and leverage, but are meant for branches no larger than  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inch diameter. Hand saws are best for branches 2-3 inches in diameter. Branches over three inches thick are best cut with power tools. Maintain your tools. Sharp, oiled tools require a lot less energy and create less strain.

Your equipment should fit your size, build and capabilities. Avoid heavy tools. Be mindful of the length of the rake or shovel. Longer handles can ease back strain. Handles that are too short can cause excessive forward bending and can cause back strain. The end of the rake handle should reach the height of your ear when you are standing upright. There are quality tools sized for shorter gardeners.

Enlarged handles or cushioned grips can be helpful for those with arthritic hands. Ergonomically designed tools have become widely available and can minimize aggravation of arthritic wrists or shoulders.

Lightweight wheelbarrows are easier to lift and maneuver, but consider the design of the wheelbarrow. Is it a lightweight cart, but with wheels in the back versus the front? This type can be awkward to lift and heavy to move. When the wheel is in the front of the wheel barrow, the weight is over the wheel and is less work for you to lift. This allows you to get closer to the load and lift with your legs instead of your upper body and back.

#### Avoid overuse injuries

Excessive weeding or trimming with hand pruners or snips can lead to tendonitis of the wrist or elbow.

Avoid repetitive motions—actions performed more than 4 hours per day or 20 times per minute. Switch tasks and/or positions. Mix in some other activities to give your back a rest. Excessive raking can lead to discomfort in the upper back, lower back, shoulders and neck.

A few hours of gardening spread out over the week can often accomplish more work than one long full day of gardening and can do so without resulting in sore muscles and an aching back.

Gardeners with limited time and small windows of perfect weather may have to resort to some degree of overuse. For that conundrum, there is always the time tested solution of a hot bath and a glass of wine to sooth those tired muscles!