



JEFF MINNICH GARDEN DESIGN, INC.

SPRING!

Dear Clients and Friends,

I returned from a long interval in Miami to a perfectly glorious early spring—already, I have daffodils, camellias, pieris, mahonias, sweet-box, crocus, hellebores, etc. etc. blooming in my garden. Since I stayed in Florida later this year, I came back to spring and not late winter—which I prefer! Most of you know I do not like the cold! This winter was warm and lovely in Miami, more so than usual. So...now it's time to get busy. We have much to do in our gardens!

Still no word on the airing date for my HGTV *Curb Appeal* episode...I was told early summer, tentatively...will let you know when I hear. Thanks to all of you for asking.

Spring maintenance

We do provide a seasonal maintenance service. This entails clean-up, fertilizing, trimming/pruning, spade edging, mulching, planting annuals and pre-emergent weed control. We do not provide lawn care. If you are a gardener and choose to do it yourself, I will go over some of the things you should address:

- **Clean-up**—Clean out all dead leaves, branches, etc., and dispose of them. Cut back all the dead tops of your perennials; many of them should be emerging. Some are later to come up, though, so don't be alarmed. Also pull up all the dead annuals from last year that you may not have removed.
- **Trimming/pruning**—First of all, trim all the dead wood out of everything. If you are not sure if a plant is dead or not, WAIT. I doubt much was killed this mild winter, but you never know. Just be sure to give the plant time to bud out before you hack it back. It may be June before you can be certain. You should also have a good tree care person to take care of your trees. Keep them

on retainer—it's worth it! Here are some general guidelines for pruning: things that bloom in the spring—for example, forsythia, lilac, azaleas, dogwoods, camellias...prune after they finish blooming, as severely as you'd like. Be sure to finish this spring pruning by the 4th of July or so since all these things will set their buds this summer for next year on the new growth produced this year. Things that bloom in the summer—for example, crapemyrtle, summer spireas, rose of Sharon, summer hydrangeas (but not the blue/pink)...prune now as severely as you'd like.

These bloom off the new growth produced this spring. Things like clematis, hydrangeas, roses—these particular plants can vary on their pruning rules even by variety or type, so best to look up online or give me a call before you cut and sacrifice the bloom. Often, the reason

plants don't bloom is because they were pruned at the wrong time. Non-blooming plants, deciduous or evergreen—you have a lot more leeway here and you can prune almost anytime. But remember, with all pruning (like anything else) there are exceptions to the general rules. When in doubt, check before you cut.

- **Fertilizing**—The big feed on lawns is usually in the fall since that's when it's most beneficial. If you want to feed in the spring, a weed and feed product is good to hold back the broadleaf weeds. Also, don't forget to put down pre-emergent crabgrass control ASAP—blooming forsythia is your signal to get busy on the crabgrass control. Shrubs, groundcovers, landscape plants—I usually only fertilize when I think a plant could use a boost...if a plant looks vigorous and healthy, I don't bother. If I do, I like Woodace, Plant Tone, and Holly Tone. Old-fashioned 5-10-5 and 10-10-10 work well, too. These last two work well in the annual and perennial beds, too. You could also use well-rotted compost or manure for your vegetable and annual beds. For pots, use



Osmocote. It's time-released and lasts the season. On all these, follow the instructions on the sack so you don't burn the plants. If your plants' leaves are yellow with the green veins showing, they probably need iron...very common in plants like azaleas, gardenias, and other acid-loving plants. Use Ironite or a chelated iron product you can spray on.

• **Edging and mulching**—Re-edge your beds with a spade so they are nice and crisp, then mulch with no more than 2-3 inches of hardwood, pine bark or pine straw (needles). Hardwood mulch binds together best, so it won't wash as much in hilly areas. The bigger the chip on the pine bark, the more it floats and the harder it is to plant annuals through it (you'll find the trowel stabs the chips!!) Make sure you don't have the mulch up against tree trunks and stems of plants—plants need to breathe and there is a lot of oxygen/carbon dioxide exchange going on where the trunk/stem meets the soil. If you have many layers of old mulch already in place, you may want to rake some of that out, or just very lightly top dress. Studies have shown that a too-deep mulch layer turns into a "false soil" layer; the roots of a plant will grow easily in this layer and not go deeply into the soil. This is not good because that thick mulch layer does not have the nutrients of the soil below. This can result in deficiencies—a common one is the iron deficiency I mentioned above.

• **Weed prevention**—We like to use a product called Preen on the beds after we mulch. It's not a cure-all, but it sure does go a long way in helping to prevent weed growth. It's a pre-emergent, so it zaps the weed seeds as they are beginning to emerge. And it will zap any seeds coming up, so not a good idea to use it in areas you are seeding, like vegetable and annual beds. Know this about the herbicide Round-up, too: it is non-selective, so if you spray to control weeds, it will kill EVERYTHING in its path. It's a great product and works through the plant, not the soil, to kill it. Thus, it becomes inactive when it hits the soil, so you can immediately plant in an area sprayed with Round-up. But be careful what you hit when spraying. You don't want to lose a prized plant.

• **Planting times**—It's perfectly fine to plant all trees and shrubs now. We've started. We find it best to put perennials in after the ground has warmed a bit and the perennials have had a chance to get some growth on them. So we wait until late April/early May to start on the perennials. Annuals—pansies, snapdragons are fine now; the pansies decline when it gets hot. The tender things (most annuals) shouldn't go in until the ground warms and the chance of frost has passed. This is on average April 25th in the DC area—later to the north and west, earlier to the south and east of the city. I wait until May 1 or so in my own garden. You will not gain anything by planting early for two reasons: the chance of frost; and the plants will sulk and not grow in too-cold ground. Vegetables—cool-season things can go in: broccoli, radishes and most root crops, greens, etc. Wait until May 1 or later for things like tomatoes, peppers, okra, corn, beans, etc. They like hot soil.



Azalea time at Woodland Cottage

Let me know if you need any help with any of your gardening needs this year, including landscape design/installation/maintenance; patios/walks/walls; stone work; pots and container gardens; fencing; lighting; garden furniture and ornament; water features; irrigation, etc. etc. Most everything for the garden.

I hope that we have lots of sun, lots of moisture (at night, so we can enjoy the sunshine in the daytime!!), not

too much heat or cold or wind, few insects—in other words, a perfect gardening year. Impossible or improbable? Maybe, but I can dream! That's what I love about our spring: a fresh start with a healthy dose of optimism and hope. Work hard on your gardens and they will reward you beyond measure. Enjoy them and have a great spring! And thanks for your continued business and confidence—it's a great pleasure to work with each of you.

Best regards,