



JEFF MINNICH GARDEN DESIGN, INC.

Spring Arrives

Dear Clients and Friends,
A warm, lovely January allowed us to dig in right after the New Year began and install the initial phases of some wonderful, new landscape projects. What a nice jump on the spring season! Finishing up my January work, I escaped to Miami Beach on February 3rd, and returned on February 27th. Everyone said I missed an awful month of icy, cold weather. If you know anything about me at all, you know that I really hate cold weather. I'd loaded my car up with everything I needed to work from Miami Beach while I was there, and I did do an enormous amount of preliminary work for the spring season, as well as some much-needed corporate work. E-mail, the internet, cell phones...it's amazing what can be done now from a distance!

I did accomplish a couple of small designs while in Miami Beach which was fun. Many people have asked me, "Are you moving to Miami Beach?" And the answer is, "No." Will I spend time down there? Yes. Arlington is, and always will be, home base for me. I love my time in Miami Beach; it's always good to get home to Arlington, too, wherever I've been. The best part of Miami for me, besides the weather, is the time I spend with my close friend, Andre Brandao, the artist. I love his work, too. It's very colorful, textural, and he paints with his hands! Here's his website: www.andres-place.com. If you like any of his art and you are interested, let me know. I can help you with it.

Like many of you have done, are in the process of doing, or are thinking about doing, I am in the process of beginning an addition off the back of my house this year. Basically, a screened porch on the lower level, and a new master suite above it. I've been thinking about this for years, like many of you, and this is the year for me to do it. In preparation, all the plants from the entire middle portion of my back garden have been moved to the perimeter. Next, the lighting and irrigation lines must be moved/re-routed. Construction is supposed to begin around June and continue at least until the end of this year. I am trying to prepare my head for this. I know it will be



disruptive, yet totally worth it in the end. After the house construction, I'm going to have some fun re-working the back garden. In the meantime, the front garden, waterfall and perimeter of the back garden will be open to you for a visit, as always. Please know that you can stop by and walk through at any time. Already, things are starting to bloom beautifully.

Be sure to check out my newly re-designed website. Peter Wohlsen, of Wohlsen Design LLC, has been working hard to freshen up and up-

date the site. We've added some new photos, as well. I know you will enjoy it. There is always seasonal information under the "News" tab.

It's time, so here is a reminder of spring maintenance chores:

- Clean up all leaves, sticks, debris, etc. from beds and lawns so plants can start to breathe again and grow.
- Winter damage—many parts of the country had a mild January followed by a frigid February, resulting in winter burn on broadleaf evergreens and more tender plants. The best thing to do now is NOTHING. Leave these plants alone...do not dig them up, cut them...NOTHING. Most of the winter burn damage will be superficial, to old leaves. As the new growth comes out in April, May and June, the old leaves will drop off. Once the plant is in full growth and you can see what is dead and what is not, THEN you can clip off the dead wood, if any. PLEASE WAIT, don't jump the gun...you may prune off good wood or throw away a perfectly good, well-rooted plant if you act too quickly. *PATIENCE*.
- Cut back ornamental grasses, including liriopse, to the ground, as needed. DO NOT cut back mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*) because for some reason, cutting it back retards its regeneration of new growth. Go figure. Cut perennials back to the ground as needed and desired. Prune back summer-flowering shrubs/trees

(i.e. butterfly bush, crapemyrtle, vitex, rose-of-sharon, etc.) as far as you wish. These bloom off the new growth. The spring bloomers (i.e. azaleas, camellias, rhododendron, dogwood, cherries, lilacs, spireas, forsythias, etc.) have their buds or have already started to bloom—they produced them last summer and have been waiting—and if you cut them now, you won't have any bloom. Wait until after they bloom and prune to your heart's content, but get it finished by July 4 or you might cut off the buds forming for next year's bloom.

- Pansies can go in if you did not plant them last fall, but wait until May 1 to put in your summer annuals. Average last frost is April 25 for the DC area; later if you are north and west and earlier if you are south and east of the city. Those clients out of the DC area should ask their local nurserymen—or call me—for the best times to put in tender plantings. It is always best to wait rather than jump the gun; plants that like warm ground sulk if put in too early, and can rot if it's wet. You're not gaining anything by rushing. On the vegetable front, you can plant lettuce, radishes, broccoli, kale, cabbage, onions, peas—to name a few—and other cool-season vegetables that don't like the heat. Wait until May to put in your tomatoes, eggplants, beans, squash, okra, cucumbers, melons, and other warm-season vegetables. They like ground that is nice and warm.



- Fertilize if you think your plants could use a boost. I like Hollytone for the acid-lovers like azaleas, hollies, rhododendron, etc. (acid-lovers are listed on the fertilizer sack). For other plants, I use plain old 5-10-5 or 10-10-10. For my houseplants that I move outside and my outdoor containers, I use Osmocote, a slow-release, long-lasting fertilizer. You can get it in four- or nine-month formulations. Now, all that said, I only fertilize if I think my plants need a boost. Too much fertilizer, if not really needed, can produce too much soft growth, which is then susceptible to fungal diseases and is weak. Be sure to follow the recommendations on the sack.

- Lawns: major feeding should have occurred in the fall, on cool-season grasses like bluegrass and tall fescue; that's when the grass roots grow the most. Too much food in the spring produces too much tender new growth...a sure set-up for disease later. If you want to help green up your lawn, a light feeding is okay. Again, follow the

directions on the bag. Crabgrass pre-emergent (preventer) should be applied when the forsythia is in full bloom. Be sure to tell your garden center rep if you plan to do any seeding of your lawn; some products may keep that seed from germinating, too. Go ahead and cut the grass very low the first time to clean it up, and then set the mower on the highest setting for the season. You may have to cut more often, but your grass will be healthier. Taller grass shades the roots, thus reducing the need for water; it shades the crowns of the plants, which makes the grass thicker underneath. I have no lawn—because I choose not to and really don't have enough sun—therefore, I am not the world's biggest lawn expert, but I do read as much as I can on the subject. Mostly, it's just common sense.

- Mulch can be applied at a maximum 2-3 inch depth. If your mulch seems thick already, rake off some of the old mulch and top dress lightly with new mulch. Too much mulch is detrimental to your plants, and too little won't help control weeds and keeps the soil moist. You can use shredded hardwood (the most popular type in this area), pine bark, pine straw (pine needles), cedar...there are many different types. For weed prevention, apply Preen weed preventer according to the instructions on the package.

Have a wonderful spring and summer, and I hope you enjoy your gardening this year. 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 thank you again for your kind support of my work and my business. It is a privilege and honor to work with each of you. You are much appreciated.

Best regards,