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SECTION E

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2011

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DENNY'S SOAPBOX

Start now on spring to do list

By Denny McKeown
Enquirer contributor

The soil throughout your lawn is warming, and you can see the signs of spring which officially starts Sunday. The robins are busy digging worms and other insects while at the same time aerating your lawn (no, they're not eating your grass seed).

The No. 1 issue to deal with in your outdoor living area is the amount of moisture in the ground.

The soil needs to be dry enough that you can walk on your lawn and planting beds without sinking.

If you're thinking of mulching, don't do it unless you're mulching with pine straw. All other types of mulch will trap moisture in keeping your plant roots too wet and should not be applied before mid-April, at the earliest.

Patience is a virtue

You can go ahead and loosen existing mulch with a cultivator. Apply a weed seed preventer to your landscape beds now that contains Dimension™ which prevents weed seed germination for four months. Re-apply this product again in early July and you will be protected for the rest of the 2011 growing season.

It is now time to cut back roses to 8 to 10 inches from the ground. Climbing roses are the exception, since they bloom this year on canes that grew last year. You don't want to prune them.

This time of year would also be a great time to apply the systemic insecticide Imidacloprid to the soil around each rose at the rate of 6 ounces per bucket of water. This application will provide an entire growing season of protection against harmful insects.

You have to be selective when pruning shrubs to avoid cutting off this year's blooms. Many trees and shrubs have their bloom buds now, and if you prune before they bloom, you're cutting off your flower color for this year.

Prune and seed

Wait to prune any spring blooming plant until after it flowers. You can prune any summer flowering trees and shrubs now.

For seeding any of your lawn now, rent a seed slicer and apply turf fescue at the rate of 5 pounds per 1,000 square feet for over seeding, 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet for bare areas.

If you do put down grass seed, don't apply a pre-emergent until your new seed germinates. Then put down a pre-emergent that contains Proflam. This will protect your lawn from weed seed germination up to eight months.

One final note: Don't even think of rolling your lawn to smooth it out. Nature has worked all winter heaving and thawing your lawn (free aeration). It will settle and smooth out as it starts to grow, just like it has in previous years.

FRESH IDEAS

Spring

FROM NATURE

By Amy Howell Hirt / ahowell@enquirer.com

Sunday is the first day of spring, and that's reason to celebrate, even if there's still a chill in the air and bag of salt near the front door. Here are a few fresh ideas to help plant some inspiration for the season ahead and pretty-as-a-petal housewares that bring the sights and smells of the garden indoors.

SMOOTH ROSES

Rose-shaped knobs are an affordable way to dress up a dresser or a couple cabinet doors. New "Le Fleur" knobs from Atlas Homewares have a glossy ceramic finish and an antique nickel base.

Available in coral mist (pictured), sea mist and white mist. \$9.20 for 1½-inch-diameter knob; \$10.40 for 2-inch-diameter knob; at www.atlashomewares.com (under "Cabinet Hardware") or through Bona Decorative Hardware in Oakley or Norwood Hardware in Evendale.



SIP OF SPRING

With pomegranate, pink flower and red cherry designs, these Sip for the Cure mugs from the Republic of Tea offer a selection of the soft pinks that are synonymous with spring. The dishwasher-safe stoneware mugs come with a lid that doubles as a coaster.

\$13 each (with 98 cents going to Susan G. Komen for the Cure) at www.republicoftea.com.



Provided photos

FRESH-PICKED

Until that first juicy tomato is ready, fill up with "Tomato" pasta bowls from the Food Network. The five-piece earthenware set includes four 9½-inch bowls and one 12-inch serving bowl. Dishwasher- and microwave-safe. \$59.99 at Kohl's stores and www.kohls.com.

BEAUTIFUL BATHROOM BASIC



With bright botanic illustrations on the boxes, Yardley of London's new soaps double as affordable bathroom décor. Pomegranate Rose nods to the current surge of interest in the fruit but the soft scent and base of essential oils stays true to the brand, and the Cocoa Butter soap smells good enough to eat.

\$1.49 each at stores, including Walgreens and Kroger.

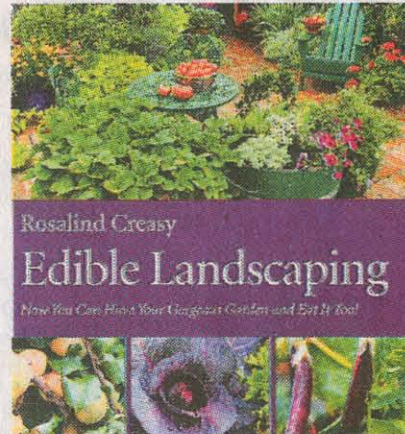
CLASSIC COPPER

It felt like the end of an era when Smith & Hawken stores closed in 2009. But in January, the 32-year-old brand released many of its iconic pieces to expand the collection available at Target, including long-handled garden tools, table furniture and copper pots.

Eden Park Copper Collection, pictured, \$59-\$299 only at www.target.com/smithandhawken.

YUMMY READING

It's hard to believe Rosalind Creasy wrote her first book on this subject in 1982. In November, Sierra Club Books released a new version (\$39.95) with the landscape designer's updated advice on organic gardening, an "Encyclopedia of Edibles" and ideas for incorporating vegetables, fruits, nuts and berries into a luscious landscape.



MORE SPRING PRODUCTS, E3



To do in the garden this week

Now is a good time to start summer vegetable and annual seeds indoors.

Give your houseplants their first full strength fertilizer application of the season.

The best planting time for trees and shrubs begins in mid-March.

Resist planting in or walking on your flowerbeds if the ground is too wet. To test, take a handful of soil, form into a ball and drop it. If it remains in a ball, the soil is too wet. If it crumbles, the soil is ready to be worked.

Finish cutting back ornamental grasses before new growth emerges.

Cincinnati Horticultural Society

TOOL: Bucket organizer

We love the no-nonsense design of the AWP 36-Pocket Bucket Tool Organizer for quick grab-and-go repairs or as the permanent container for frequently used items.

Designed to fit most 5-gallon buckets, the organizer has 36 pockets and loops of varying sizes to fit most styles of tools, and the polyester material easily wipes clean.

\$9.98 at Lowe's.

Amy Howell Hirt



Provided

Old house clinic

From failing plaster and drafty windows to deteriorating masonry, homes built before 1955 are a different breed, sometimes with a unique set of care and maintenance issues.

The Building Doctors—experts from the Ohio Historical Society's Preservation Office—will hold a clinic at 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 7 in Lebanon. The free seminar will be held at the Lebanon Convention & Banquet Center, 121 S. Broadway, and will address how to recognize and solve some of the most common sources of problems, and how to make informed decisions about repairs and improvements while preserving the home's history.

From 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday, April 8, the experts are available for a limited number of free consultations at homes within 5 miles of the banquet center.

Advance appointments and seminar registration is required. Visit www.building-doctor.org or call 800-499-2470 or 614-298-2000.

Amy Howell Hirt