

## Early Spring Gardening

By: Melinda Sperl

Outside is still cool and our plants are barely starting to grow. Now is the time to trim plants and fertilize flowerbeds. Avoid trimming hawthorns and azaleas now as you will lose their spring bloom. Roses need to be trimmed very short in the spring. Also, plant some spring annuals for lots of color after this dreary winter!

Flowering plants need a higher nitrogen fertilizer with a ratio similar to 19-13-6. Use a slow release fertilizer with ratios of 13-13-13 for non-flowering plants. Slow released fertilizers are recommended on flowerbeds and grass as there is less chance of root burn.

St Augustine & Bermuda are warm season grasses and it is important for them to stay dormant while we are having cooler weather. Just like with your shrubs, if you force them out of dormancy too early, you stress the plant/grass, which can make it more susceptible to disease and insects later on in the year. The optimum time to fertilize grass is after it starts growing on its own or right after you have to mow it the first time. That is mowing the grass not the weeds!

Weed killers are available that will kill the early season weeds, like clover, but in reality those weeds will usually die out as soon as it gets warmer. These type weed killers also can have a residual effect in the ground water and may harm trees. The best treatment against these weeds is applications of Pre-emergent Herbicides twice per year to kill the weed seeds before they germinate and pulling them out by hand.

Check your irrigation system now for leaks so you don't find out in the heat of summer when your plants are dying. We have had enough rain now though that your irrigation system should be turned off.

Happy Gardening!

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