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SPRING YARD CLEANUP

Cleaning up your yard after winter can be so easy yet very beneficial and begin as early as the snow melts! The first step is to pick up all the litter and remove all animal indiscretions. It is important that you don't compost any doggie doo doo because it can create unhealthy pathogens in your compost bin. The next step is rake up any leaves you may have missed in the fall. This will accomplish two things; the first it will prevent any fungal issues such as snow mold and secondly, a good deep spring raking will break up thatch build up. Don't forget to pick up any pine cones; they can be unsightly and are quite a nuisance.

Spring cleanup in the perennial bed begins by removing any dead leaves and stalks from any perennials and ornamental grasses that were missed in the fall. Try using a scissors instead of a pruner as this will allow you to reach the tight places easier. Spring pruning of shrubs can be a little more difficult if you don't know when the plant blooms. The best rule of thumb, if you don't know, is to not prune early spring blooming shrubs like Lilac and Forsythia until after their spring bloom; their buds have already set in the fall and pruning before blooming will result in poor flowering, if any at all. If you have late bloomers, the shrub can be pruned in the spring because they produce flowers on new growth. The Butterfly Bush and Potentilla are good examples of a late bloomer and can be pruned in late winter or early spring before the new growth starts. These late bloomers can even be pruned all the way to the ground without any fear of losing bloom production since they are vigorous growers and a good pruning will be very beneficial to the plant.

Removal of mulch should be done as the soil begins to thaw. It is important to remove the mulch before the emergence on any new growth. A thick layer of mulch will impede the new plant growth and also cause it to retain too much moisture, which will eventually cause fungal problems. It is easier to prevent diseases compared to curing them! Be prepared to mulch the new plant if the cold returns.

Most perennials can be divided in the spring - with the exception of Peonies and Lilies which should be divided in late summer or early fall. Bearded Iris flowers should be divided in July or August following their bloom. These are only guide lines, with varying weather conditions from year to year will have an impact on the growing season just slightly. The reason behind spring dividing is that it allows the plant several months of root growth to recuperate before heading into winter. Dividing perennials will serve to propagate them, to keep them under control, and to keep the plant healthy so it can be enjoyed it for a longer period of time. To summarize, the division of perennials is to divide them in the spring, especially in our climate.

Next, you'll want to prepare your planting beds. In existing perennial beds, adding compost in and around plants will give them just the right amount of fertilizer. This is the best, and easiest, thing for your existing beds. Now is a good time to remove any weeds, including those you missed last fall along with the new ones that have just emerged. It is easier to stay on top of weed removal than it is to take care of them after they



have become established! If you have to fertilize with a chemical fertilizer be careful not to apply any to the plant itself as chemical fertilizers will burn the plant. Here is where composting will pay off, it is nature's natural fertilizer! And composting will not burn the plants as chemical fertilizers will. Compost will not only benefit perennial beds but it is great for annual plants, vegetable gardens, lawns, trees, and shrubs. If you must use a chemical fertilizer on your perennial beds, I would recommend a 10-10-10 formulation. In general, most weed killers and pre-emergent pesticides will harm your perennials more than they will benefit the plants. Weed control can be done by using a landscape cloth or other form of mulch along with hand picking the weeds. Starting the weed control early in the spring is the easiest way to keep up on this dreaded chore.

New perennial beds can be made by removing the grass, either by suffocating it by using old news papers and mulch or with using a chemical weed killer. To do the suffocating method, you must have enough newspaper to cover you desired area about ten sheets thick; after the newspaper is down, cover it up with 4-5" of mulch. This method will take several months to kill the grass and have it decompose into natural organic matter. An easier and faster way to remove the grass is to use a chemical weed killer like Bonide Kleenup which effectively kills all green plants systemically (this means that the product is absorbed into the plant and distributed throughout the entire plant). Using a chemical method, you will see results in as little as a week. Bonide Kleenup does not build up in the soil and will break down into natural elements. The treated area can replanted in as little as one day.

Your vegetable garden also needs to be tended to; start by removing any leftover plant material and placing it in your composting site. Next is to apply a 2-3" of compost to the garden area. This, along with a good tilling, will give the soil the boost it needs to grow a productive vegetable garden. [Be careful not to till up your garlic bulbs you planted last fall.] A layer of straw between the rows will act as a great organic weed barrier and will eventually break down into organic matter in the soil.

The lawn will need its own special care; besides the initial clean up of trash and other unwanted items, spring is the time to core aerate the lawn. This will relieve any soil compaction, break up thatch, supply more oxygen to the soil, allow for better water penetration, and help the turf grass to absorb more nutrients. An early application of a good weed and feed will give your lawn a nice boost along with controlling broad leaf weeds early in the growing season. Bonide makes a wonderful product for this called Weed Beater Ultra. When using any chemical fertilizer or pesticide, make sure to read the label and understand it. The label is the law and any misuse of these products can be harmful to our environment. A healthy lawn helps suppress weeds by not allowing enough room for the weeds to grow, the turf grass will choke out the weeds thus requiring less use of chemical herbicides.

Spring is the time when the landscape is susceptible to fungal growth. As stated earlier, it is easier to control a fungus than it is to cure it! An early application of a fungicide will control most fungal issues before they become a problem. Applying a fungicide just as the plants are starting to grow in the spring will help to curb this issue. Bonide makes a variety of fungicides, both powder and spray form, which will prevent these diseases. A few they offer are: Captan, which is a multi-use fungicide; copper dust and copper fungicide RTU; and Fungoil concentrate – these all work when the product is applied to the plant. INFUSE concentrate is also a nice option as this one works as a systemic. The proper use and timing of these products will help to prevent any fungal disease.

Following these simple spring clean up tips is the first step to a beautiful landscape. After a long winter who isn't excited to get outside and work in the yard? This is an excellent time to assure a long and healthy growing season - Enjoy!!