

# Gardening tips for March

## Flowers and houseplants

☞ You don't need the luck of the Irish to grow a shamrock. Give it moist soil and cool Irish nights—night temperatures in the 50s are best. Don't worry if the plant turns yellow after a few months. Your shamrock plant is just starting to rest, just like all of us do now and then. If this happens, just ease up on the watering and replot the bulbs in fall. Take care of your shamrock plant and next St. Paddy's Day it will be as green as the Emerald Isle—and that's no blarney.

☞ Potted tulips are sometimes given as gifts this time of year. These bulbs have experienced a hard life as they were forced into bloom indoors. Such "forced" bulbs rarely bloom a second time. Throw them away after they are done blooming.

☞ Do you have any geraniums that you kept over winter? Now is a good time to replot them. Cut them back (6 inches or so) to keep them bushier.

☞ Cannas, callas, begonias, and dahlias can be started indoors in late March or April to promote earlier blooming. Plant the bulbs in small pots and transplant the plants to the garden later in spring.

## Trees and shrubs

☞ This is the best month for pruning leafy trees and shrubs. The stress of pruning to dormant plants is minimal and the wounds will heal nicely when spring arrives.

☞ The wound of a well-pruned limb will look like a donut as it heals itself.

☞ Shredded wood from evergreens is fine for use as mulching.

☞ The sap in maples and birch trees can run strong in March. Nevertheless, now is a good time to prune these trees. Don't worry about the bleeding of the sap. Some scientists believe this sap can actually help seal wounds.



## Vegetables

☞ Tomato seedlings exposed to a slight breeze will grow more compact and sturdy. A small fan can be used to create the breeze. Constant breezes are best, but fanning the plants for only a few minutes per day can be beneficial.

☞ Overwatering is the #1 killer of young transplant seedlings. This causes stem rot, a condition called "damping off". Avoid watering seedlings when the soil is already moist. The use of sterile, soilless mixes will also prevent diseases.

## Fruits

☞ This is the perfect time of year to prune fruit trees and grape vines.

☞ 'Valiant' is one of the most popular grapes grown in North Dakota. It is very easy-to-grow, hardy, and productive. Growers in other northern states struggle with this variety since the grape clusters of 'Valiant' are so densely packed. Such packing can trap rainwater and lead to "bunch rotting." But our dry summer weather reduces this problem. The leading grape currently grown for winemaking in the state (and much of the Midwest) is 'Frontenac', developed in Minnesota. The most promising seedless grape is 'Somerset'.

## Lawns and Grasses

- ☞ Rake your lawn as soon as the final snow melts. This raking removes debris that contributes to leaf diseases.
- ☞ Ornamental grasses can be clipped back to the ground in late March before new growth begins. This will promote faster regrowth.

## Wildlife

- ☞ Early arriving robins will appreciate a snack of raisins.
- ☞ Now is the most important time to feed birds. Their sources of natural food are scarce now.
- ☞ Squirrels often dig up bulbs. Combat these “furry-tailed rats” by placing a barrier over the emerging bulbs. Nylon netting, which is often used to protect strawberry beds and cherry trees from birds, may be temporarily placed over the soil. Chicken wire or floating row covers are other options. Our goal is to frustrate the squirrel—then it will move to the neighbor’s tulip bed. If you are feeding birds, temporarily stop because bird feeders attract squirrels.
- ☞ Now is the best time to trap rabbits. Bait your live trap with greens or carrots. Rabbits are starved for food now and can be easily captured. Trap them now before they start breeding in spring. A single mother rabbit can bear 36 bunnies in a year!

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**NDSU** EXTENSION  
SERVICE

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