

Q Now that the snow has melted, what should I be doing in my yard and garden to ensure I have a good season? - Gallatin County

A Aside from fall, spring is one of the busiest times in the yard. Good preparation and planning now ensures less work during the summer months, which means more time for fun and relaxation. Below is a yard and garden checklist of tasks to think about doing soon (late May to early June) so that the landscape will be lush and abundant in the months to come.

Woody Ornamentals:

- Prune lilacs and other spring flowering shrubs right after blooming
- Transplant trees, shrubs and perennials
- Watch for cedar-apple rust on junipers
- Pinch candles on pine trees to maintain size and shape

Turf grass:

- Fertilize lawn according to maintenance schedule (low, medium or high)
- Begin lawn irrigation (1" of water per week on average) and don't let up if fertilizing regularly
- Apply broadleaf weed herbicide to lawn if necessary
- Begin mowing at regular intervals, cutting off only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the blade at a time

Fruit:

- Remove winter mulch from around strawberries
- Fertilize fruit trees and shrubs (be careful not to over-fertilize)
- Fertilize raspberry bushes
- Hand-thin apples to two fruit per cluster

Vegetables:

- After Memorial Day usually marks the beginning of the planting season in Bozeman with the average date of the last killing frost being June 1. As a general rule, plant garden vegetables when the soil temperature at 2-4" is an average of 65°F.
- Harden-off vegetable transplants started indoors
- Side-dress (fertilize) rhubarb and remove flower stalks as they appear
- Thin vegetables such as carrots and beets if necessary

Flowers:

- Sow bedding plants after frost danger has passed
- Side-dress (fertilize) peonies
- Deadhead flowers as needed
- Plant tender bulbs
- Pinch annuals to make them fuller

Develop a regular schedule for maintaining the landscape and after a season or two it will become second nature. With just a few hours of hard work and diligence this spring, the yard and garden will be ready to go for summer and you can sit back, relax and enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of your labor.



Do you have Master Gardener questions? Send them to:
extensionmagazine@montana.edu

Q Many of my trees, especially my aspen and fruit trees, have a dark gray coating growing on the trunks and branches and have had for years. Now I am seeing it on the fir and pine trees. Should I be worried?

- Sanders County

A The coating you are seeing is most likely a “sooty mold.” Sooty mold is the common name of one of the many types of dark fungi that grows on trees, leaving a dark, “sooty-like” layer on the upper side of the trunk and branches. However, the fungi are not feeding on the tree, but rather on the dew that is left from piercing insects, like aphids and soft scale. Aphids and soft scale insects feed on the sap of the tree and excrete a sugary, sticky substance commonly called “honeydew.” The sooty mold grows mostly on the branches and trunks, but if it worsens, it can also grow on patios, decks, sidewalks, and other trees and shrubs. Basically, it can grow wherever the honeydew lands. In the long run, and if there is enough sooty mold, the fungi can eventually inhibit the amount of light that the plant can get from the sun if it is on the leaves or needles. Most of the time trees can withstand some insects and the sooty mold is moderate. In severe cases, it is recommended to control the insect populations, rather than spray a fungicide for the sooty mold. In this case, a systemic drench of imidacloprid to the trees is recommended. With systemics, the insecticide is taken into the tree and the insects feeding on the tree, creating the honeydew, will be affected. This should clear up some of the sooty mold issue if the trees are treated yearly. However, it may take a couple of years to observe a sooty mold decrease.



What do I do when my houseplants get sick?



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It is proven that houseplants reduce stress, create a feeling of well-being, improve air quality, lower background noise, and add beauty to indoor spaces. That is, until our houseplants get sick.

The most common houseplant problems are drafts (both hot and cold), watering issues (mostly over-watering), lack of nutrients, the wrong pot size, insects and disease. Of all the issues that can go wrong with indoor plants, diseases are probably the most misunderstood and misdiagnosed. There are only three diseases of houseplants to worry about: rots, mildews and molds.

Root and stem rots are often caused by overwatering or improper drainage of the pot. Symptoms of root rot are wilting, leaves turning yellow or red and dropping, or an overall sickly look, even though a plant has been watered. The best way to determine if there is root or stem rot is by removing the plant from the pot and examining the root system. Oftentimes the roots will be soft, brown or black, and have a foul smell. To correct rots, either throw out the plant and start over, or repot using new planting media and a container with better drainage, reduce the amount of watering, and let the soil dry out between watering.

The second most common houseplant disease is powdery mildew. Powdery mildew, sometimes mistaken for dust, appears as powdery white, gray or even gray/brown patches that develop on the leaves, stems and flowers of the plant. It mostly occurs in environments where there is high humidity, poor light, and poor air circulation. Powdery mildew can often be found on plants that are in bathrooms with poor lighting. To treat powdery mildew, clip off the affected leaves and flowers and move the plant to an area where there is increased light, less humidity and possibly in a room with a fan.

Finally, there are some molds that can affect houseplants. Molds can be mistaken for mildews, but the growth often turns dark gray. Molds also can accumulate on the surface of the soil. As with mildews and rots, mold can usually be eradicated by changing the environment. Remove the parts of the plant affected by the mold, reduce the frequency of watering and let the soil dry out between waterings, improve air circulation and if mold is on the soil, repot with new, clean planting media.

To learn more about houseplant care, search online “houseplant” and “extension” to see unbiased and research-based cooperative Extension websites that will answer most houseplant questions. I found Cornell University’s website <http://warren.cce.cornell.edu/gardening-landscape/> houseplants to be very helpful. ■