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The sun is out, the days are longer, the Winter Daphne is perfuming the air with its flowers, buds are swelling - that only means one thing:

Spring is in the Air!!

Despite the crazy winter we've had, the cycle of the seasons continues and as we venture out into our gardens, it's time to assess the situation and see what has survived and what damage has occurred. The number one question I'm asked right now is about individual plants and whether or not they are alive, because they sure look dead! Here are some guidelines and tricks to help determine whether or not to remain hopeful for a plants return:

- **Bud Test** - for plants with woody stems. Look very closely at branch tips and along the stems for tiny buds that may be emerging. Although many deciduous plants may seem dead after the winter, closer examination may reveal signs of life after the winter.
- **Scratch Test** - for plants with woody stems. With your nail or the tip of a pruner, scratch the surface of the bark to reveal the cambium layer just beneath the surface. If you see green there, step back and let the plant recover. In time, buds will begin to form along the woody stems and the plant will begin to regrow. Do not cut too deeply into the surface as the interior of woody stems is usually brown, and may be misleading.
- **Snap Test** - for plants with woody stems. Take the tip of a stem and gently bend it. If it snaps immediately, chances are that portion of the plant is dead. Sometimes only the tips of the stems have died back and there is still life closer to the ground. Sometimes, upon closer investigation, you will notice that the dead stems have a slightly darker, wrinkled or grey color than the stems without damage. Go ahead and remove the dead stems leaving the live ones to regrow. A certain amount of die back is not uncommon with many trees and shrubs.
- **Crown Recovery** - Some woody plants, like Hardy Fuchsias, will sometimes die down to the ground over the winter only to regrow from the roots in the spring. If all stems are dead, cut the plant down to the ground, looking closely around the base for signs of new growth. Signs of life may appear to be small bumps along the stem. If you are cutting down dead woody stems, remove them in increments and examine each cut for signs of green along the outer edges of the stem. If you see green, STOP and wait for re-growth in a few weeks.
- **Total Meltdown** - for herbaceous (non-woody) perennial plants. You may notice that some plants (like New Zealand Flax) that may have been fine in previous winters are now looking like they've collapsed. Many plants that are heat lovers will take many months to recover. You'll wait and wait and as soon as you've purchased a replacement, you'll dig out the plant only to see new growth coming from the center. Patience is a virtue. Waiting until June or even July will pay dividends as plants return to active growth once the soils have warmed up and the sun is shining daily. *Acanthus mollis* (Bears Breech or Grecian Pattern Plant) is another example of this kind of plant. Even though the crown seems to have turned to mush, you'll find that vital roots remain in place to set the stage for return to growth. These

plants will recover, but may take another year to get back to their previous size. Sometimes, that's a good thing.

Tasks for the Garden in Late Winter

- **Trim Ornamental Grasses** - especially ones that are dried, but still upright. These can be trimmed down to the ground, but a little haystack shape may be more interesting until they begin to grow, which will happen soon. Evergreen grasses like Carex (sedges), Blue Fescue and Blue Oat Grass may show some winter damage and if so, should be also trimmed back to a small mound. New growth will soon cover the old crowns. Clean up Blue Oat Grass by raking through the foliage with your fingers. The dead foliage will easily come out in your hand.
- **Prune Roses** - If you haven't already done so, President's Day is the official weekend to prune your Roses. Choose 3-5 stems that form a circle around the roots. Remove stems growing inward, crossing stems and weak or misshapen stems. Look for the nodes - horizontal lines along a stem from which buds emerge. If you look closely, you will see the dormant bud along the node. Make your cut just above the node with a bud facing out. It is this bud that will grow into this year's stems.
- **Remove Weeds Early** - Many early weeds are up and thriving already. Get out there during the sunny spells and get a head start on weeds before they take over your garden. Pull easy to remove "pop weeds" (cardamine) with the white flowers before they go to seed and explode all over the garden. Attack dandelions in your lawn with a dandelion fork before they flower - or better yet, harvest them as a nutritious edible green. They are relatively easy to pull when the ground is soft. Same with Blackberry - but back vicious thorny vines and easily dig out the roots with a shovel or 2 of soil. Finally, annual grasses are starting to show up - pull these early while the ground is soft, or save your back and use a hoe. Be sure to toss them in the yard debris though, because at this time of year, grasses will re-root with our regular rains.
- **Plant Early Crops** - Valentine's Day is the time to start your peas! They can go right in the ground or some prefer to sprout them indoors before planting. If you've tried peas unsuccessfully before, you may need to get some inoculant for your soil, available where seeds are sold. It is also the season to start a new asparagus bed (grown from roots), along with roots of rhubarb, horseradish, artichoke, or plant onion sets (pre-grown baby onion starts). It is also safe to plant seeds of lettuce, spinach and other leafy greens, radish and beets directly in the ground. If you are new to gardening, check out the following books: [Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades](#) by Steve Solomon (proprietor of Territorial Seed Company), or [Maritime Northwest Garden Guide](#) put out by Seattle Tilth
- **Harvest and Spread Compost** - Take advantage of your homemade compost to add to your garden soil, or purchase compost from a local supplier. I recommend Humus from Natures Needs in North Plains, OR or Mighty Microbe Mulch from Soil Builders in Rigefield, WA. Remember, not all composts are created equal. If it stinks, don't buy it. That means it is unfinished. It should smell like the earth, musty and dark.
- **Transplant Trees & Shrubs** - if you've been thinking that some plants are just in the wrong place, now is the time to do something about it. Moving plants while they are dormant is the best way to assure survivability, and get them established before the hot, dry summer.

Upcoming Classes and Events

- **Rain Gardens 101** - March 21, 9am-12:30pm - FREE Learn how to site, plan and build your own Rain Garden - Seven Dee's Nursery 6025 SE Powell Blvd. I'll be co-teaching this program and many others this year. Registration is required. Find out more: <http://www.emswcd.org/raingarden>
- **Food Garden, Chickens, Starting Seeds, Fruit Trees, Natives and more** - weekly series at Livingscape Nursery 3926 N. Vancouver Ave. Find out more: <http://livingscapenursery.com/>
- **Better Living Show** - March 27-29, Portland Expo Center - The Northwest's Largest Sustainable Lifestyle Show. Find out more: www.betterlivingshow.org
- **Gardenpalooza** - April 4, 8am- 4pm - Fir Point Farm, 14601 Arndt Rd, Aurora, OR. 40 Nurseries and Garden Vendors. Find out more: www.gardenpalooza.com
- **HPSO Plant Sale & Art Fair** - April 11-12, Expo Center - This is the place to find interesting and hard-to-find plants and garden art. Find out more: <http://www.hardyplantsociety.org/plantsale.htm>
- **Intro to Organic Farming & Gardening** - March 7- May 16 - 10 week series at Zenger Farm covers starting seeds, growing vegetables, weed management, soil cultivation, composting. \$200/series, \$25/class Find out more: http://www.rainyside.com/events/event_viewer.asp?event20090307005.lst
- **ANLD Behind-the-Scenes Garden Tour** - Save the Date - Sat. June 27 10am-4pm - Sixth annual event benefits Landscape Design Students at PCC and CCC. I will be offering half-priced tickets after June 1, when they become available. Contact me if you're interested. Find out more: <http://anld.com/gardentour.asp>

Garden Coaching

I have always tried to offer the best value for the services I provide. Whether you need some "new eyes" to give you ideas about what is possible in your garden, a walk-through to help determine best organic maintenance practices or what/when/how to prune existing plants, where to locate a vegetable garden or chicken run, or whether a rain garden is appropriate at your house, Call Plan-it Earth Design for a consultation today.

Design-on-the-Fly is a popular service for the budget conscious homeowner interested in integrating your garden with your home. A 4-hour design intensive consolidates the design process into one fun, collaborative, interactive event geared toward creating a plan of action that can be implemented immediately by you or a recommended landscape contractor. Functional circulation is the first consideration, followed by privacy plants or main structural elements - the "bones" of the garden. Smaller plants are added as time allows. The result? A useable scale drawing of your property to begin garden building or suitable for getting bids right away. This popular service gets booked up fast, so call for more information and schedule an appointment today.

If what you need is a Master Plan for implementation now or over time, Plan-it Earth Design will work closely with you to provide a personalized, earth-friendly garden to fit your home, property, lifestyle and budget. Many homeowners have spent more time and money purchasing plants that get too big or don't thrive, or moving plants from place to place and still don't have a garden that is cohesive or even useful. Stop being overwhelmed. Let Plan-it Earth Design guide you from concept through completion and provide you with the garden retreat you deserve. Now is the time to stay home, feather your nest and create a vacation spot in your own backyard. Call today and let's talk about what is possible.

Develop your Vision - Improve your View

Happy Gardening!

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