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## **Spring Seeding and Gardening Tips**

### **March - May**

If you have a semi warm space to start seeds, now is the time. Flagstaff has a notoriously short growing season, the last frost generally being mid-June. Start cool weather crops indoors or in a cold frame. Cool weather species include most leafy greens like arugula, spinach, kale, lettuce, cabbage, collards, as well as broccoli, brussel sprouts, and cauliflower. Consider cool weather herbs like parsley, chives, thyme, and winter savory. Or other non-traditional greens such as pea tendrils and nasturtiums. Root crops like carrots, onions, radishes, and beets should be sown directly outdoors in April when the garden soil is warmer. If you have a greenhouse, you can start warm weather crops inside in March and April. These include tomatoes, eggplant, corn, peppers, grains, and curcubits (melons, cucumbers, etc.).

Planting: If you have a cold frame, you may plant your cool season crops there in early spring once they have multiple sets of mature leaves. Monitor night time temperatures and close your cold frame for any hard freezes (below 28 degrees). It is beneficial to warm up the soil when possible before planting, either with warm water or insulated covering, such as black or clear plastic. You can warm water by leaving a hose full of water out in the sun for the day. You may begin to bring warm weather crops outside during warm days to harden off - allowing them to better adapt to fluctuating weather patterns outdoors. Direct seed your cool weather varieties into the ground in late spring. Your cool weather seedlings and starters can go directly into the ground in late

spring as well. Continue to monitor night time temperatures for any hard freeze. Use old blankets, burlap, or table cloths to cover any foliage on very cold nights. Be sure to remove the coverings first thing in the morning.

Fertilizing: Once the soil becomes soft enough to work with your hands, add organic material such as compost, aged manure, or peat moss to your perennials, trees, and shrubs. You could instead top dress the plants by spreading organic material around the base, extending out as far as the root system goes, and thoroughly watering it. Liquid fertilizers will also work. Always remember the three basics of fertilizer: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), and Potassium (K). Nitrogen is extremely important for vigorous foliage growth, phosphorous for roots, fruits, and seed production, and potassium for overall growth of stems and movement of water. If you are having trouble with specific areas or species in your yard, get your soil tested. This will tell you what nutrients you may need to amend. You can buy basic soil test kits at your local hardware store or nursery. Look for local labs that do soil testing to get more specific results.

Pruning: This is a good time to complete any dormant pruning, old seed heads and last summer's spent flower heads. Do not prune spring flowering trees and shrubs at this time. Try to prune before buds break and between extreme cold snaps to protect newly exposed tissue.

Watering: If spring is dry, be sure to water your plants. Depending on soil type, plants should be getting approximately two inches of water per month. Wind, humidity, and temperature are also a factor in how much water plants need. The occasional deep watering is preferable to frequent, shallow watering. Plants that have been in the ground for less than two year are still developing their root systems and will need more moisture than well established species.

Mulching: Start removing some of the protective layers of mulch. The primary benefit of mulch is to keep the ground frozen longer in the spring, preventing the soil from repeatedly freezing and thawing. However, if it's left on too long after temperatures begin to rise, it will prevent light and air from reaching new growth and slows the warming of soil. Plants will stay dormant longer than necessary and become susceptible to rot. As temperatures rise, pull the mulch back from the base but keep it handy. If

there's a late hard freeze, recover the base for protection. As it starts to heat up significantly, you will use it to retain moisture. If your mulch pile is low or non-existent, now is a good time to gather more. Woodchips, pine needles, wood shavings, and/or old deciduous leaves all make an excellent mulch. In the high desert, water conservation is imperative. Research your crops individually to see what soil moisture content they prefer. A lighter mulch, like wood shavings or loose pine needles, allows more air and moisture through. While denser mulch, like wood chips, acts as a sturdier barrier.

Maintenance: Weeds will be starting to grow at this time. Eliminate them as early and quick as possible to save yourself the headache later. The most effective method is to remove the entire root system. If this isn't possible, cut them down to the ground every two weeks to weaken the root system. At the very least, cut the seed heads before they mature and disperse to prevent spreading. It's suggested to dispose of your noxious weeds, bindweed and morning glories for example, in a sealed trash bag. Less hazardous weeds, such as dandelions, can go into a compost pile or refuse bin. Use the [www.plants.usda.gov](http://www.plants.usda.gov) Arizona state listed noxious weeds for more detailed information on specific species.

Pest Control: As you've observed and pruned your garden, you may have noticed a particular outdoor pest: scale. These sap-sucking insects cause significant damage to trees, specifically willows and aspens, and shrubs. Typically, they will be found on newer growth, though not always. Horticultural or Neem Oil should be used as a spray through March and April because scale are typically in their soft-bodied phase at this time. You can find appropriate integrated pest management supplies at your local nursery or online. Neem Oil is also a good pest management spray inside your greenhouse or cold frame to control adult stages of aphids, thrips, and spider mites.



