

Spring Gardening



I often get asked if gardening takes a lot of my time. Overall, the answer is no. Yet there are times during the year where crops need changing, soil needs amending, trees require pruning, and flowerbeds need thinning and weeding. Now is the time to do the Spring Gardening here in Phoenix.



Fortunately, we have someone to help us maintain our 2+acres. However, he has been out sick for the last 6 weeks. My husband and I are enjoying the extensive yard work in the interim as it is giving us a chance to evaluate and improve our outdoor area.

The Orchard



Our orchard has primarily citrus trees, planted long before we purchased the home. From oranges to kumquats, we love being able to pick fresh fruit many months of the year.

Timing is everything when you fertilize your citrus trees. Generally, you should fertilize your citrus tree at least once every two to three months during your tree's dormant periods of fall and winter. Then once every one to two months during the tree's active growth of spring and summer.



Therefore it is time to fertilize citrus trees now. President's Day is my cue to remember, then Mother's Day and Labor Day.

What Kind of Fertilizer



Citrus fertilizer

NPK is the abbreviation you find on any fertilizer bag. It stands for nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (K is the chemical symbol for potassium). Nitrogen encourages green growth, phosphorus encourages strong roots for flowers and fruit, and potassium encourages healthy fruit size, shape, color and flavor. Fruit trees need a balanced ratio of all three to support the growth of sturdy roots, strong branches and large, juicy fruits. Consider slow-release fertilizer as too much nitrogen at once isn't recommended.



Fertilizer works best when applied to a mulch circle around the tree. Mulch circles keep grass from competing with the tree for water and food. They also prevent damage from lawn mowing, and help keep the root zone cool and moist.

Slowly we are working our way through each tree to create a large clean mulch circle around every one. In addition, all

dead branches are being trimmed from the citrus trees. Soon we'll have gleaned all the fruit, leaving room for fragrant blossoms to appear in next year's crop.

To give you an idea of how many fruit trees we have: 4 Grapefruit, 8 Oranges 2 Lime, 1 Lemon, 1 Kumquat, 1 Limequat, 2 Tangerine, 1 Apple, 2 Apricot, 1 Peach, 1 Fig. That's a lot of mulch circles!!

The Garden



My garden

As returning visitors to my Spring Gardening updates may know, there are 5 raised bed planters in my vegetable garden within a white picket fence: 1 raised flower planter and numerous surrounding beds at ground level.



With the winter garden reaching its prime, it is time for me

to plant our Spring selection. First, I clean out all the dead/dying plants.



Next I add fresh compost. I am a huge fan of composting because it is easy, reduces your waste by 30%, and the plants love it.



Compost Tumblr

To see a previous post on Composting 101, click [here](#).



For my garden, I prefer compost that is basically clean; no small sticks or other dry debris. I sift the soil loosely over a wheel barrow before I transport it to the garden.



Large bed-future site of strawberries and flowers

Here I let it sit in the beds for a few days or several weeks, depending on what I am planting. Currently I am awaiting a shipment of strawberry plants so the bed is ready to go!



Seeds from Floret Farm

Since I buy so many flowers, I decide to have a cutting garden this year. I ordered seeds willy nilly from [Floret Farm](#), not taking the time to determine if they work for our planting zone (9B for USDA charts). What was I thinking?

For some reason I make the assumption that all flower seeds are planted in the Spring, which, is not the case here in Phoenix. With 10 packets of flowers seeds, only 5 are able to be planted now. The balance will have to wait until fall.



Sunflower seeds

Using jumbo craft sticks, I mark the location with the name of the flower, planting date and # of gestation days. Since the sun patterns will change in the next few months, I will be interesting to see how they do in this location.



Some of the winter vegetables are looking so good and healthy, there is no need to remove them just yet. It is very rewarding to head to the garden just before dinner and pick ingredients for a fresh salad. Most of my tomato plants survived the winter so I will keep those too.



Swiss chard

If you live in this area, my go-to bible for gardening is the *Planting Guide for the Valley of the Sun* by Kevin E. Erdmann (2004). I finally found the link online for the Bedding Planting Guide and [here](#) it is. However, if you are interested in the Vegetable and Herb Planting guide, contact me at marycrz@cox.net and I can scan it and email it to you.



What I love about this planting guide is that it tells you when to plant by month, whether to plant seeds or starters, if they are annuals or perennials and when they bloom. For a complete list of what you can plant this Spring, see last year's post [here](#).



fresh Kale, fennel and tomatoes

The gardening activity will continue as I make my plant selection so more to come on that! Keeping my fingers crossed that the frost is over, as it was 37 degrees yesterday.

Being out in the fresh air and sunshine is just heavenly. The only drawback to gardening is that I am so sore! Time to use those muscle relaxing bath salts I made over the holidays. See

recipe [here](#).

Happy Wednesday!

Mary

