

Spring Cleaning:

Why Now is the Ideal Time for Landscape Clean-ups and What They Entail

by Melanie Albright

The winter was certainly harsh and lasted much longer than most Floridians prefer, but now it is nearly spring and we can finally enjoy ourselves outside in shorts and a T-shirt. Hopefully said harsh winter won't cause us to step outside and see our beloved plants shriveled and dead, but unfortunately this will likely be the case. This is where the infamous spring clean-up comes into play.

Spring clean-ups are vital for the health of your landscapes. Some of those seemingly dead plants may spring (no pun intended) right back to a healthy state just from a quick trimming. This should be done with time in mind since if they are not trimmed promptly the dead tissue will consume the living, resulting in not a seemingly dead plant, but an actual dead one.

While trimming keep in mind that you should not cut the plants too far back and you should not cut your spring blooming plants at all. If plants are cut too extensively, their health and landscape potential can be severely reduced. If plants that flower in the spring are cut, so is the opportunity to see the plants' beautiful flowers altogether. It can be difficult to tell what your plants need, whether a trim or complete removal. If you are in doubt, consult with a landscape specialist who will be able to offer sound advice.

Removal of the dead is not only done through trimming your plants or removing them altogether. It is also necessary in the case of fallen leaves. Grounded leaves must be removed so they don't suffocate the living plants or grass that they are covering. This is why removal of any and all of the dead plant tissue in your yard, including leaves, is important in maintaining a healthy landscape.

Spring clean-ups don't stop after the cleaning is done, as we all well know. After a spring clean-up, our yard may need to spring (a little pun intended) into aesthetic shape as well due to the removal of dead shrubbery. Many options are available when revitalizing the look of your yard after a spring clean-up.

Filling mulch beds is one way to improve your yard. Mulch helps plants in various ways starting from the soil. It moderates the soil's temperature as well as retains water, decreasing the need for watering. Mulch also blocks weed seeds from the soil, lessening the opportunity for new weeds to sprout and overtake your landscape. In this way, it reduces the need for chemical weed killers. Ultimately, mulch is a tool that reduces your yard's required maintenance as well as one that keeps it looking beautiful.

Another form of ground cover that is ideal to get established before the hot summer months is sod. Zoysia grass has many benefits including its vibrant, deep green color and the fact that it does so well in the heat and, let's face it, the summer months in Florida can produce scorching temperatures. Spring time is the best time to get your sod established before these heats and the rainy season arrives. (Continued on Page 2)



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For the same reason it is also important to get new plant roots established in the spring. Installing new plants to replenish the vibrancy of your yard is a favorite part of the season for many. There are many plants to choose from that will be suitable for your preferences and needs. Plants add life to your landscape and improve the look of your home, making it an inviting and comfortable setting.

Don't avoid spring landscape clean-ups, as often times it is less work when it is done promptly and can even save your plants' lives and you money. After the initial clean-ups are completed, revitalizing the look of your yard makes it easy to take full advantage of the beautiful weather. ♦

Featured Job

Before



After



Tips and Tricks

to Optimize Your New Landscaping

1. Once a week watering times are still sufficient for plants in March. There is no need to overwater right now, as the weather is cool and breezy.

2. March is a good time to cut back plants that were frozen in the winter. When doing so, be sure not to cut too much or too little by scraping the stem and petioles of the plant with your fingernail to find where it is green. Green indicates life. Cut just above it, unless the skin is peeling off. In that instance, you'll need to cut a little lower. If any part of the plant is brittle and breaks off, it is dead.

3. Planting new shrubbery is a fun part of spring time. To increase the potential of your new plants, provide them with a good soil mix as a place to root and obtain nutrients. Good soil mix will include compost, which acts as fertilizer by providing nutrients to plants and promoting plant growth, as well as a natural pesticide for soil, repelling unwanted insects and weeds.



The Birds and the Butterflies

Though you may be thinking about another insect to finish the title, spring reminds me of the birds and the butterflies, among other wildlife. In the January 2011 edition of *The Scoop from the Soil Up*, the fact that animals are attracted or repelled by the plants in your yard was briefly noted. If you want to attract butterflies this spring, here are some ideas:

In a butterfly garden, it is important to have plants that not only attract adult butterflies, but that also act as hosts to larval butterflies. This is a good way to see all stages of the butterfly life as well as to attract the highest variety of butterfly species.

As the variety of plants in your garden increases, so does diversity in butterfly species that are attracted to your garden, leading to more butterflies. To increase the variety of plants, implement those with different blooming times, colors, shapes and heights.

Something that goes hand in hand with the importance of different plants is knowing what the plant will need in terms of locale. Based on the particular plant, place it in the shade or in the sun. This added variety will increase the attractiveness of your garden to



butterflies as well as expand your garden.

Butterfly gardens are not just beneficial for aesthetic reasons. They are useful as a natural pesticide by providing a setting that attracts other insects and small animals that eat garden pests. Furthermore, butterfly gardens can also act as a stress reliever simply by observing its beauty. To optimize your butterfly garden, use plants that attract different stages of butterfly life, that are high in diversity, and that will extend to different areas in your yard.

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