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 **Gardeners Eagerly Anticipate Spring**

 Willie Chance

As children eagerly await Christmas and lovers look for Valentines so gardeners anticipate spring. Warm winter days tease them with promises of fresh flowers, crisp vegetables and lush lawns.

Don’t believe these fickle winds that blow warm temperatures our way. Bright days in

January are fair weather friends - here today and gone tomorrow. Expect cooler weather for awhile. We expect our last frost in mid-March, but it could come as late as early April. Remember those fierce late winter storms we get. Their effects are often worse than the cold we receive now. This is true because the plants are more susceptible to cold as they begin to bud out.

For now plants need cold. Flower buds set late last summer need so many hours of cold to bloom properly. Most spring bloomers are like this - peaches, quince, azalea and many bulbs.

Wait until after spring blooming plants flower to prune them. This way you do not cut off the flowers. The exception to this is fruit trees. They generally produce too many flowers so you prune them before they flower.

When should we start pruning? I like to wait until at least the middle of February. Some plants will be more sensitive to cold after pruning so we want to do it as late as possible. You can even prune most plants after they begin to bud out.

What can you do now, as you anxiously await spring? You can plant most woody plants now. You can also try English peas, onion sets or plant, elephant garlic now, but wait until mid-February to plant potatoes. Cabbage, collard or broccoli plants may survive now but would probably do better in late February.

In February, apply preventative weed controls to your lawn. I generally suggest Atrazine for Centipede, St. Augustine and Zoysia lawns and Balan for Bermuda grass. If a Bermuda lawn is fully dormant (brown), then you can use Atrazine on it, too. Wait until late March to fertilize.

As buds begin to swell, you can cut branches and bring them inside to bloom. Change the water often for best results. Call for more details.

Another February chore is mowing your liriope. We do this once a year to remove old dead leaves. Set your mower on its highest setting and mow it or use a weed eater. Do not damage the crowns or mow it after new growth has started. Late mowing damages new leaves.

Fertilize pecans in late February or early March before the grass greens up. This way the tree gets more of the fertilizer. Use 4 lb. of 10-10-10 per inch of trunk diameter at chest height. Spread this thinly and evenly around the tree from the trunk to a point out beyond the edge of the branches. Use only 1 to 2 pounds for small trees. If possible, find fertilizer that has zinc in it. Pecans need zinc in their diet.

Fertilize bulbs, as soon as they come up. Use l lb. of 10-10-10 per 100 square feet of bed. Early feeding, watering, as needed and leaving the leaves on the plants, as long as possible, makes for stronger bulbs and better bloom next year.

Sound like a lot to do? It is and spring will soon be here. Let’s get busy and prepare for our favorite season. For more information on getting a jump on spring, call the Houston County Extension Office at 542-2020 or 987-2028. You can also reach us at our website at

http://www.griffin.peachnet.edu/ga/houston

Interested in learning to prune? Attend the pruning workshop at Macon College on

January 30. It is sponsored by the Bibb County Extension Service and is free, but you must register by Monday, January 25.