

Is it spring yet? I'm chomping at the bit. Or is it chomping at the trowel and spade? Gardeners have been asking me all kinds of questions lately and I've noticed some themes so I thought I'd share the answers with you in case you have some of the same questions.

Everyone wants to know if it's time to prune roses. Yes. But we've been having heavy frosts for the last week or so and you might want to wait a few more weeks. Hybrid tea roses need annual pruning. Tea roses are grafted onto rootstock (notice the large bump at their base). Ground-cover roses, flower carpet roses, shrub roses, *Rosa rugosa* and mature climbers don't need pruning every year. Pruning is to encourage new growth and blooming. Roses other than tea roses do this naturally.

The rules of pruning are to remove the three Ds – dead, diseased or damaged. You'll also prune rubbing and crossing branches and stems. (Rubbing and crossing is part of what causes the three Ds.) This applies to all woody plants that need pruning and tidying. With tea roses, remove the three Ds and shorten the very longest branches by one third. Cover the cut area with Elmer's glue or craft glue. This prevents the rose borer from drilling down through the rose cane.

Climbing roses and other big rambling roses sometimes need sprucing with pruning. Remember the three Ds. However, Ciscoe Morris once said on his radio show that the trick to getting climbing roses to bloom is to be sure the canes are curved back down towards the earth. Check to make sure you still have some of the canes pointing earthward.

Woody shrubs and trees can be pruned in the spring too. With fruiting or flowering bushes it's wise to wait until after they bloom. If you prune them now, you might cut off too many flowers for this year. Lilac and hydrangea blooms grow on the old growth of the plant. If they need to be trimmed, remove no more than a third of the growth. That doesn't mean cutting the whole plant back. What you'll do is choose a third of the stems and cut them back to the ground.

Blooms of lilacs and peonies often take from three to seven years to bloom. If you have young lilac and peony plants don't give up. There are other reasons why peonies don't bloom. Peonies like their crowns to be in shallow soil. As a rule peonies need three to five buds (the little bumps that make the stems, leaves and flowers) before they will flower. See if you need to remove some of the soil to expose some of the eyes. Hopefully then your peonies will start flowering for you. Peonies also need cold winters to bloom their best. Our winter was pretty mild so we might not have as many blooms this year. Gardening sometimes requires quite a bit of patience, doesn't it?

Some gardeners have been wondering about cleaning up and removing all the dead foliage and stems from last fall and winter. It's perfectly fine to do it now. Be careful that you don't disturb or damage new plant growth. You may have to use clippers to cut back some of the dead stuff. But usually it will come off in your hands as you clean it up. Remember that the aged plant matter makes great compost.

Speaking of compost Dave Peters, County Recycling Guru, asked me to let you know about the Master Composter classes. The classes will cover composting, natural lawn care, soil food webs and the use of aerobically brewed compost tea for disease suppression in plants. Those interested must attend all of the classes on April 17, 19, 24, 26 and May 1 and 3 from 7-9 p.m. and two all-day field trips on April 21 and 28. Additionally Master Composters have several hours of payback time (volunteering) in Kitsap County. Call the Cooperative Extension Office at 360-337-7157 for more information.

Mark your calendars now! Kitsap County will sponsor a truckload sale of compost bins on March 17 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Fairgrounds. This is the same weekend as the Home and Garden Expo. You can get a three-foot high by three-foot diameter “Seattle” compost bin for only \$38. It’s a great bin at a great price. And it makes really good compost out of our garden vegetative debris.

Want to learn pruning from Plant Amnesty? Call 206-783-9813 to register. Class is Saturday March 17 from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The fee (including lunch) is \$95 prepaid to Plant Amnesty. You’ll be learning and pruning in an old established garden on Bainbridge Island

*You can email comments to Peg at [gardenmentor@yahoo.com](mailto:gardenmentor@yahoo.com) or in care of this newspaper.*