

DIG THIS by Peg Tillery (for 3-22-06) March Gardening Tips © 2006

This March has lived up to its name by coming in like a lion. Hopefully it will indeed go out like a lamb as the saying goes. In spite of the chill weather, gardeners have been calling the Extension Office to ask about the last chill date because they're itching to get outside and start gardening.

Our Kitsap Extension Office has traditionally told gardeners to wait until after May 15 to plant frost-sensitive plants. We have more than 30 microclimates here in Kitsap so you may live in an area that's sheltered and May 1 may be your date.

In spite of frost and chill water, in March, you can safely plant peas, onions, potatoes, parsley, radishes, spinach and beets. Watch and/or listen to weather reports. If it looks like we'll have a hard frost or wind chill, you may want to use a floating row cover to give protection to tender seedlings. Traditionally in Kitsap County it's best to wait until late May and ideally into mid-June to put out peppers, eggplants and tomatoes.

It's the perfect time to deadhead and clean up all the stems and seed heads left over in the garden from last year. You can also continue to do some clean-up pruning of shrubs and trees. Start making your list of the plants you'd like to purchase and plant up this year. In a future column I'll list all the local plant sales, their dates, times and locations.

If you've always loved and been fascinated by wildflowers then "Wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest" by Mark Turner and Phyllis Gustafson is the new book to add to your library. This Timber Press Field Guide (ISBN 0881927457) retails for \$27.95 and it's worth every penny. It took Turner and Gustafson several years to compile and complete this "must have" book cataloguing the wildflowers in southern British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and northern California. Flowers were recorded from the coast to the mountains and high desert including the Siskiyou, Steens and Wallowa mountains. There are more than 1200 species: annuals, perennials, shrubs and both native and non-native plants shown in the book.

The book has 511 pages. The pages are color coded with the following sections: white or whitish flowers; yellow flowers; orange flowers; pink to red or red-purple flowers; violet to blue or blue-purple flowers; and brown and green flowers. Front and back covering pages have line drawings of the plant parts for use in identification. The back cover has a ruler for measuring plant parts to ease in identification.

I had the pleasure of chatting with Mark Turner about two years ago when he was traveling the Pacific Northwest shooting photos of the plants illustrated in this incredible book. He was entirely fascinated and excited about this venture. His enthusiasm shines through in the book.

Each page features three plants with the name, classification, time of bloom and a brief but very complete paragraph about the plant and how it grows and where it can be found. Each illustration also includes a map showing the plant's range. Turner is a member of

the native plant societies of Washington and Oregon. He has been studying native plants for more than 25 years.

Phyllis Gustafson has more than 20 years experience in the nursery trade and had a small seed-collecting business specializing in Northwest natives. She is an officer in the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS). She has explored the native plants of Oregon for more than 35 years.