



MARCH

FULL MOON 7th NEW MOON 21st AV. TEMP. 6.8°C (44.2°F) AV. DAYLIGHT 6:25–18:13 (11hr 48m)

March can be cold, but you'll get plenty of bright days, too – especially when the clocks go forward. That extra hour of daylight gives gardeners more time to get everything done – and there's quite a list. But the riot of spring blooms will give plenty of encouragement.

KEY TASKS

- Start mowing lawns regularly, and re-seed any bare patches.
- Mulch bare soil in borders.
- Put pond pumps back into the pond, and make sure they're safe.
- Water indoor plants regularly.
- Propagate shrubs by layering.
- Prune shrubs with colourful winter stems.
- Sow hardy annuals where you want them to flower, and sow vegetables outside.

LAST CHANCE

If you want to plant bare-root trees and shrubs, now's your last opportunity until autumn. As the weather gets warmer and foliage develops, they find it harder to retain water, making it more difficult for them to establish.

AROUND THE GARDEN

There is nothing better for clearing out the winter cobwebs than working in the garden on a clear, warm spring day. Luckily, March has plenty to keep you busy.

GENERAL CARE

Look out for pests

As the warmer weather returns, many pests return with it – so keep an eye open for signs of slugs and snails, which can cause damage to plants. An organic solution is to water a tiny nematode onto the soil when the weather warms. Traps are also effective. One of the oldest and best known is the beer trap: a jar sunk into the ground with the lip just proud of the surface, filled with beer. Hedgehogs, frogs, toads, and thrushes also prey on these particular pests, so do what you can to encourage these predators. Lay a flat stone in a border and you will soon notice if a thrush is using it as a handy “anvil” on which to smash snail shells.

Mulch bare soil

Weed and tidy bare soil, then mulch it with organic matter like well-rotted farmyard manure, garden compost, or chipped bark. In dry spells, bare soil in borders will very quickly lose water. Covering it with a thick layer of organic matter will slow this down and reduce the need to water. This is especially important for young trees, shrubs, and perennials that have been recently planted – and you don’t want to let them go short of water in their first year. A mulch will also suppress weeds. Never put a mulch on top of dry soil, though: if the soil is dry, water it first. A layer of compost is just as good at keeping water out as sealing it in.

Repair damaged lawn edges

Lawn edges can easily become damaged in summer, and they can even crumble away in places – especially with light, sandy soils. Now is a good time to put things right. Cut out the entire damaged portion of turf and turn it around so the good side now becomes the edge. Fill in the hollow edge with soil and sow it with grass seed. Water and peg polythene over the top to encourage the grass seed to grow and then you will have a perfect repair.

Transplant shrubs

As the soil starts to warm up, March is a good month to move shrubs. Plants will begin to take up water from the soil now, which will help them re-establish just as they begin to grow. When moving shrubs, take as large a rootball as you can manage – if it’s particularly large and heavy, you might need to enlist help to carry it to its new home. Provide protection from cold winds with a screen of hessian, and be sure to keep it well-watered.

Create new hedges

If you’ve been thinking of establishing a new hedge in your garden, now’s your last chance to buy and plant bare-root hedging plants. After March, only those grown in containers will generally be available until autumn, which can make buying in bulk for hedges expensive.

TREES, SHRUBS, AND CLIMBERS

Layer shrubs to make new plants

Many shrubs, such as hydrangeas and philadelphus, will layer themselves quite easily by forming roots on shoots touching the ground. But for plants that need a little more encouragement, cut into the stem to stimulate root growth and dust the wound with hormone rooting powder before pegging it down. The layered shoot will have formed roots by the following spring, when it can be cut from the parent plant and planted elsewhere.



CONTAINERS

Plant up your pots

Now's the time to put your planning into practice and plant up your pots. When it comes to growing plants in containers, let your imagination run riot: small trees, shrubs and climbers, herbaceous perennials, annuals, alpines, and ground-cover plants. The only real rule is to look after them well: don't forget to water, feed, and deadhead them regularly. If you're inclined to forget feeding, try adding a slow-release fertilizer. This works by naturally breaking down and releasing nutrients over time.

Trim and divide herbs

Tidy up perennial herbs growing in pots, such as rosemary and sage, by cutting back old woody growth. This will encourage healthy new stems and leaves to grow in their place. March is also a good month to increase your stocks of chives and mint. Tip any clumps of herbs onto a surface and divide them into smaller groups. Plant these out either into the existing pot with rejuvenated soil or into new containers. Water them in well. The plants should have a good start and give plenty of new growth.



THE KITCHEN GARDEN

With colder weather now in retreat, outdoor sowing can begin tentatively with potatoes and onions. You can also prepare your seedbeds.

Get seedbeds ready for sowing

As the weather gets warmer, remove fleece or cloches from seedbeds. Rake over the soil, breaking down lumps, until it forms a fine tilth. This is every vegetable gardener's dream: crumbly soil, with no stones or large clods. If it's too dry and dusty, water it. If it sticks to your boots, let it dry out a little.

Feed overwintering crops

Vegetables that have been in the ground over the winter – such as onions, kale, and hardy lettuces – may be a bit worse for wear. Perk them up with a top dressing of blood, fish, and bone meal, chicken manure, or seaweed-based organic fertilizer.

HARVEST HIGHLIGHTS

Spring onions

Your first spring onions of the year should be ready for lifting now, if you sowed seeds last August or September and left them in the ground to overwinter.

Spring cauliflowers

Provided they have survived any severe frosts or very cold weather, hardy, overwintering spring cauliflowers planted out towards the end of last summer should now be ready to harvest.

Swiss chard

This month you should be picking the first of the year's Swiss chard and spinach beet. It will have overwintered from seeds sown last summer.

DON'T FORGET

- **Remove dead leaves** from brassicas to stop mould and downy mildew spreading.
- **Check for aphids** on all soft fruit bushes.
- **Apply fertilizers** before seeds are sown.



1 *Daphne mezereum*

1.2x1m (4x3ft)

From late winter until early spring, mezereum's exquisitely perfumed pink flowers cluster on bare branches.

GROW IT in sun or partial shade in slightly alkaline, humus-rich, moist but well-drained soil.

2 *Chaenomeles x superba* 'Knap Hill Scarlet'

1.5x2m (5x6ft)

This spiny-stemmed, deciduous shrub brightens up the early spring garden with large scarlet flowers with golden anthers.

GROW IT in any fertile, well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. It works well for shrub borders, sunny or shaded walls, and hedging.

3 *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta'

5x5m (15x15ft)

These long catkins add interest to a hazel's contorted branches in late winter and early spring.

GROW IT in any good garden soil in sun or partial shade, ideally at the back of a shrub border. Remove any suckers that grow from the base and prune misplaced shoots in winter.

4 *Primula* Gold-laced Group

25x30cm (10x11in)

This rosette-forming perennial produces clusters of velvety, mahogany-red flowers, each petal with a gold edge.

GROW IT in full or partial shade in moist, fertile, humus-rich neutral to acid soil. It thrives in borders, bedding, containers, rock gardens, or alpine houses.

5 *Hyacinthus orientalis* 'City of Haarlem'

30x8cm (12x3in)

The hyacinth's sturdy stems arise in spring, bearing dense spikes of highly scented, soft primrose-yellow flowers.

GROW IT in full sun, in fertile, well-drained soil. Plant as spring bedding or in pots indoors.

