

February To-Do List

By Jason Miller

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Don't let the early-year blahs get you down. Now's the time for planning, cleaning and dreaming.

In western Washington, you never know what February will bring. Any day can start with sunshine and warmth—and end with a wet and wild blowout. You can take advantage of those sour moments, though, by walking around your yard and garden (or staring longingly out the window), and taking a considered look at your current situation.

Check for standing water, which will indicate poor drainage in an area. Take in the entire lay of the land over the course of a full day and note which spots get the most sun and which are shadiest. Note your pathways—do you need new ones or do you need to repair the existing ones? Would an arbor or trellis add to your landscape design or clutter it?

February is a great month in which to design or redesign your yard and garden. Let's face it: You're not going to be out there planting seeds, even for cool-weather crops. So take your time and draw up some plans. Figure out what you want to plant and where you want to plant it, for starters.

For inspiration, check out some of those seed catalogs that mysteriously appear in your mailbox. Look through them carefully and order only the seeds or plants you need and can handle. Try not to get carried away! In fact, you might want to go through your old seed packets first and throw out the ones that are old or damaged. Make an inventory of the remaining packets and then make your new seed choices, keeping in mind the size of your garden and the fact that you will have to weed whatever you plant.

For greenhouse owners, February is a spectacular time to give that space a good cleaning. Throw away broken pots or, if they're plastic, recycle them. If your greenhouse is located in a sunny spot (or if you heat it artificially), you'll want to start thinking about insect pests. It is a lot easier to keep these populations down if you start out clean and then check carefully any new plants or seedlings that you buy. Be sure to check under the leaves and the stems, keeping an eye peeled for such critters as aphids and whiteflies, because once they get established in your greenhouse, they are very hard to eliminate.

February also is the month to shop for asparagus and strawberry starts, and fruit trees. The WSU Skagit County Extension office has a list of the varieties of all three that are best suited for our climate. You also can top-dress your lawn and garden now with compost, and sharpen up those lawn and garden tools too.



With several family members, *Skagit Valley Herald* Features Editor Kathy Boyd uses her February to lay out a plan for a newly cleared site on her property. Photo by Jason Miller.

If you use a seed-starting rack, now would be a good time to clean it up and get it ready for its intended use, which usually kicks into gear anywhere from mid-February through March. My seed-starting rack has little dried-up carcasses of peat pots, plant labels and yogurt containers—exactly the kinds of things that need to be composted, organized and cleaned up.

A final thought: It's a good idea to keep a garden calendar. Sometimes this idea strikes me as a little too detail-oriented, but whenever I remember to do it, I find it's a useful tool later on. A calendar like this can help you keep track of daily temperatures, what you plant and when you plant it. You also can use it to log your transplanting dates, giving you a record of which plants perform well and which ones fail miserably. Next year, then, you will have something to look back on to see what you didn't care for and what was a big hit.