Extension to Families
At Work...At Home

MARCH into Spring

MARCH into spring armed with habits that help you become your healthiest self. Consider these tips:

MOVE EVERY DAY – Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily for better blood pressure, stress reduction, and weight control. This can include three 10-minute bouts of physical activity throughout the day. Choose activities you enjoy, raise your heart rate, build strength, and increase flexibility. An activity buddy can help you stay faithful to your plan. (See The Kitchen Workout, page 2.)

AVOID SKIPPING MEALS – When making a shopping list and planning meals, consider MyPlate (http://www.choosemyplate.gov/). Include healthy snacks (e.g., low fat yogurt, vegetables with low fat dip, whole grain bread with peanut butter) to meet your family’s nutritional needs. Healthy snacks sustain energy levels between meals and help you stay on track with your health goals.

READ FOOD LABELS – Aim high (20% or more) for vitamins, minerals and fiber. Aim low (5% or less) for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. For more information on how to read a food label, watch the “Label Reading for Health” video at http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/page/online-lessons.

CHOOSE FOODS CAREFULLY – Become a smart shopper by reducing the amount of convenience foods eaten, choosing fruit canned in juice, and buying no salt added canned vegetables. When you are choosing foods, make half your plate fruits and vegetables and watch portion sizes.

HAVE FAMILY MEALS – Make family meal time a priority. Research shows family meals promote healthier eating. Eat as a family a few times each week. Set a regular mealtime and turn off the TV, computers, and phones. Have all family members help in meal planning and cooking.
Yard & Garden: When to Prune

In a single motion pruning demonstrates both the art and science of horticulture. Perhaps that’s why so many homeowners get nervous and postpone or ignore the task. Understanding how plants grow, why pruning is necessary and which tools to use can remove the mystery surrounding this routine practice. Horticulturists with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach answer pruning questions. To have additional questions answered, contact the ISU Hortline at hortline@iastate.edu or 515-294-3108.

When should I prune my shrubs?

The proper time to prune deciduous and evergreen shrubs is determined by the plant’s growth habit, bloom time and health or condition.

Spring-flowering shrubs, such as lilac and forsythia, bloom in spring on the growth of the previous season. The best time to prune spring-flowering shrubs depends on the health or condition of the plants.

Neglected, overgrown spring-flowering shrubs often require extensive pruning to rejuvenate or renew the plants. The best time to rejuvenate large, overgrown shrubs is late winter or early spring (late February to early April). Heavy pruning in late winter or early spring will reduce or eliminate the flower display for two or three years. However, the long-term results of rejuvenation pruning are restoration of plant health, improvement in plant appearance and greater bloom.

The best time to prune healthy, well-maintained spring-flowering shrubs is immediately after flowering. (Healthy, well-maintained shrubs should require only light to moderate pruning.) Pruning immediately after flowering allows gardeners to enjoy the spring flower display and provides adequate time for the shrubs to initiate new flower buds for next season.

Summer-flowering shrubs, such as potentilla and Japanese spirea, bloom in summer on the current year’s growth. Prune summer-flowering shrubs in late winter or early spring. The pruned shrubs will bloom in summer on the current year’s growth.

Some deciduous shrubs don’t produce attractive flowers. These shrubs may possess colorful bark, fruit or foliage. Prune these shrubs in late winter or early spring before growth begins.

Prune evergreen shrubs, such as juniper and yew, in early to mid-April before new growth begins. Light pruning may also be done in mid-summer.

When is the best time to prune shade trees?

February through March is generally regarded as the best time to prune most deciduous trees. The absence of foliage at this time of year gives the individual a clear view of the tree and allows the selection and removal of appropriate branches. Also, the walling-off or compartmentalization of wounds occurs most rapidly just prior to the onset of growth in spring. Oaks are an exception. The winter months – December, January and February – are the best time to prune oak trees.

Deciduous trees can be pruned at other times of the year with little or no negative consequences. However, if possible, avoid pruning deciduous trees in spring when trees are leafing out and in fall when trees are dropping their leaves.

To reduce the risk of an oak wilt infection, do not prune oaks from March through October. Oak wilt is a fungal disease that is lethal to many oaks. It can be spread from infected trees to healthy trees by sap-feeding beetles (“picnic bugs”). If an oak tree must be pruned in spring or summer (such as after a storm), apply latex house paint to the pruning cuts to avoid attracting sap-feeding beetles to the wounds.
When should I prune my fruit trees?

Late February to early April is the best time to prune fruit trees in Iowa. Summer pruning of fruit trees is generally not recommended. However, water sprouts (rapidly growing shoots that often develop just below a pruning cut) can be removed in June or July.

When should I prune my gooseberries?

Fruit producing shrubs, such as gooseberries, currants and blueberries, should be pruned in late winter or early spring. In Iowa, pruning can be done from late February until bud break.

When is the best time to prune grapevines?

The most desirable time to prune grapevines is late winter or early spring. In Iowa, pruning can begin in late February and should be completed by early April. Grapevines pruned at this time of year may “bleed” heavily. However, the loss of sap does not harm the vines.

LOWER YOUR UTILITY BILLS

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the average U.S. household spends about $1,900 per year on home energy. Here are some steps you can take to lower your monthly utility bills and save more money.

1. Get it Online: Complete a home energy assessment. Compare your energy use to similar homes in your area. See where your home uses the most energy.

2. Roll it Out: Make sure your home has adequate insulation. Check the attic, exterior walls, floors, basement and crawl spaces. In unheated areas, be sure to insulate around furnace ducts or boiler pipes.

3. Buy it Right: Install ENERGY STAR® lighting and appliances in your home. These light bulbs use 75 percent less energy and last up to 25 times longer than standard incandescent bulbs.

4. Seal it Up: Use weather stripping; caulking to seal air leaks; and block drafts, in the basement and attic, around doors, windows, chimneys, electrical outlets.

5. Set it Smart: Keep your thermostat at 68 degrees or lower in the winter and 78 degrees or higher in the summer to save money. A programmable thermostat that automatically adjusts the temperature when you’re asleep or away.

6. Let it Shine: Keep draperies, shades and blinds open on sunny winter days, especially with windows on the south side of your home. Closed on hot and sunny summer days as closed drapes are insulators.

7. Turn it Off: When plugged in, appliances and chargers use electricity whether they’re on or not. This wasted power is called phantom load. Save by turning off and unplugging what you can, possibly reducing your home’s phantom load by as much as one third.

8. Keep it Clear: Make sure your air registers and radiators aren’t being blocked by furniture, rugs, or drapes. Dust or vacuum registers or radiators on a regular basis.

9. Keep it Up: Service your heating system once a year so it runs properly and efficiently. Change your furnace filters regularly.
Family Storyteller Program beginning March 18

Family storyteller is an early literacy program designed to increase the amount and quality of time parents and young children (ages 3-5) spend together in literacy programs. Bring the magic of books alive in this FREE 6 week program. Each week you will receive a new book, crafts and activities. Prepare your child to grow in independence and succeed in school. Children will: increase their language skills, come to love reading, have special time with parents. Don’t Miss out at the Thompson Public Library beginning Tuesday, March 18 through April 22, from 6-7:30 pm. Tuesday evenings. If interested call Becky @ 641-584-2261.

Winnebago County Fair Fundraiser

Saturday, April 5th, Social at 5:30 pm - Meal 6:30 pm
Branding Iron Round Up room in Thompson

Social hour, buffet dinner, entertainment
Silent and Live Auctions

Cost: $20 per ticket