It’s Time to Plant Peas and Potatoes

Photo from National Garden Bureau: English pea ‘Mr. Big’

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Some gardeners plant them as early as January or as late as March, but February is the optimal time to plant peas and potatoes. Early in the month there is still time to seed some rapidly maturing cool season vegetables - carrots, lettuce, radishes and spinach. Late in the month you could try some cucumber, eggplant, pepper and tomato plants, but if we have a freeze you will need to cover these as they are lovers of warm weather.

It is too early to plant summer annuals, so hold off until the middle of next month and content yourself instead with deadheading and fertilizing those winter annuals – pansies, petunias, dianthus, snapdragons and such. They still have a lot of life in them and now will be their peak time. Stop and smell the roses, I mean the pansies, for they will soon be gone. They don’t really have a smell but you know what I mean!

When the dogwoods and azaleas start blooming, pre-emergent herbicides can be applied to your lawn to prevent the germination of warm season weed seeds. I prefer corn gluten meal, a natural by-product of processing corn because it is safe for children and pets, but there are other herbicides out there and one of our good local nurseries can help you with that. It is way too early to fertilize the grass, so a weed and feed type product would not suit your lawn since it provides both pre-emergent weed killer and fertilizer. Wait until the grass comes out of dormancy in April before you apply fertilizer. You will know when this happens because you will have to get out the lawn mower!

Speaking of fertilizer, let’s give some thought to why we do it. To keep plants alive? Nope. Look around you at all the plants that no one takes care of – in the woods and in
your neighbor’s yard (just kidding). They appear to be doing fine without any help from us. Fertilizer is used to obtain a desired effect. If you want your vegetables to grow big and make food for you or if you want your prize rose to grow a large, perfect bloom so that you can win a blue ribbon, fertilizer is your man. It also works well on new, small plants you have recently installed in your yard. Most people want their small plants to become large plants. If you want your grass to spread and cover some bare areas, fertilizer will help it do this. If however your grass is just right like it is and your shrubs are the perfect size, then you can use your fertilizer money to buy a new rake or a pretty garden ornament. Annuals and vegetables and roses will always need to be allotted some fertilizer money or they will not be happy.

February is a good month to give attention to your shrubs. Pruning is done this month on all but spring flowering shrubs like azaleas and hydrangeas. Don’t forget to prune the fruit trees and roses too. Fertilize, if you determine it is necessary, and mulch. Azaleas will be blooming this month so it is a great time to choose and plant new varieties in your yard. If you have a sunny spot and are longing for a rose bush, now is the time to plant one.

Even if you have to don the old ratty garden coat, it is good to go into the garden now. Breathe the cold, clean air of our beautiful North Florida. But hope, always hope, to feel that warm breeze in your old ratty garden t-shirt.