

**All Gardens  
Great & Small**  
by  
York Co.  
Horticultural Agent  
**Tom Becker**



#### **An Early Spring - What to do?**

There isn't all that much that we can do about the early emergence of spring flowering bulbs and perennials. Take steps now to keep the soil temperatures as cool as possible for as long as possible.

Maintain a good layer of loose-textured mulch over the planting soil to insulate against temperature fluctuations. Avoid thick, heavy mulch. It tends to smother more than insulate. A layer of dry oak leaves or similar textured mulch would be ideal.

A layer of loose mulch over the tops of emerging shoots or perennial plants also helps to protect them against rapid temperature changes. In general, emerging leaf shoots are quite hardy and take freezing temperatures with no real damage. Injury to flower stalks which are deeper into the bulb at the shoot

base are often not injured this early. Subfreezing temperatures for extended periods of time may result in some danger to bulbs and crown damage on perennials.

If all the mulch idea fails to sustain dormancy in the plants, plan to enjoy the floral displays earlier than normal this year. Generally plants retain some degree of dormancy until daily temperatures remain above freezing for several days.

Flowering trees and shrubs that have initiated growth and flowering as a result of the warmer weather may retain some degree of dormancy as long as extended periods of warmer weather do not occur. Once full flower development starts, no dormancy remains in the plant. Any plants that produce fully open flowers at this time of year will probably not set fruit later in the season. Poor or absent

pollination or freeze injury to fruit will result.

Plants in protected locations or near building foundations, pavements, and stone walls may get leaves earlier than normal. Woody plants that sustain significant vegetative and flower bud injury should be kept well-watered during dry periods. This reduces the impact of stress on the foliage needed to provide food reserves for the next growing season.

On a cultural note, it is important to keep all bulb foliage in good growing condition throughout the spring and summer to rebuild bulb quality in the soil. Very often gardeners mow off the leaves when the bulbs fail to flower for any reason. If the foliage is cut off too soon, the plants are weakened and may not produce quality blossoms next season and beyond. All foliage on plants in the spring and summer puts food energy back into a bulb below ground in order to produce a flower stalk and more foliage next season.

All plants have survival mechanisms to combat adverse weather conditions. Dormant buds in the stems and crowns of most plants may produce later growth to replace injured buds killed by spring freezes. A light pruning to remove damaged wood, or cutting back to a live stem or branch helps to retain the quality, shape and form of the plant throughout the coming

summer. Eliminate any environmental stress on injured plants. Avoid excessive pruning this coming season.

Any questions regarding the above article can be addressed to Tom Becker, Penn State Cooperative Extension at (717)840-7408.

## National Nutrition Month Workshop

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) - March is National Nutrition Month. To celebrate, Penn State Cooperative Extension in Chester County, Government Services Center, 601 Westtown Road, Suite 370, West Chester, is providing a nutrition program on Friday, March 13, 10 a.m.-noon.

Learn your sodium and fat limits. Find out how to boost your calcium intake and lower your cholesterol intake.

Confused about what some of that information on the food label means? Marlene Nash, extension agent/nutrition and health, is a registered dietitian and will answer your questions.

There is no charge for this program but registration must be received no later than March 11. So, bring yourself, a friend, and your questions about nutrition to this workshop. Call the Extension office at (610)696-3500 to register.

## What Is a Healthy Weight

FLEMINGTON, N.J. - Most Americans take their health for granted. Good health is one of the most precious gifts we can have and it doesn't usually happen by itself. Maintaining a healthy weight throughout life can help. It is the first step in achieving good health including reducing the risk for many diseases.

What is a healthy weight? It's the weight that's best for you - not necessarily the lowest

weight you think you can be. Rutgers Cooperative Extension will be offering the program "Achieving and Maintaining a Healthy Weight" on Monday, March 9, 7-9 p.m. at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Center on Route 31, Flemington. The fee for the program is \$3 and pre-registration is requested.

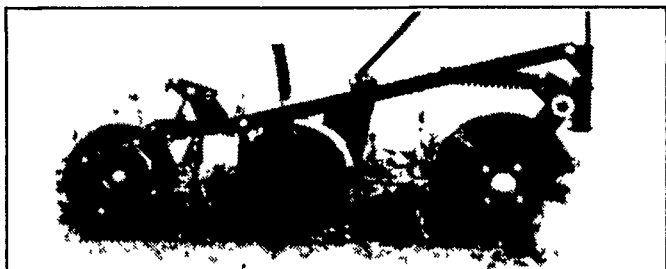
Participants will learn strategies to develop normal eating patterns to improve weight. For information and registration, call (908)788-1342.

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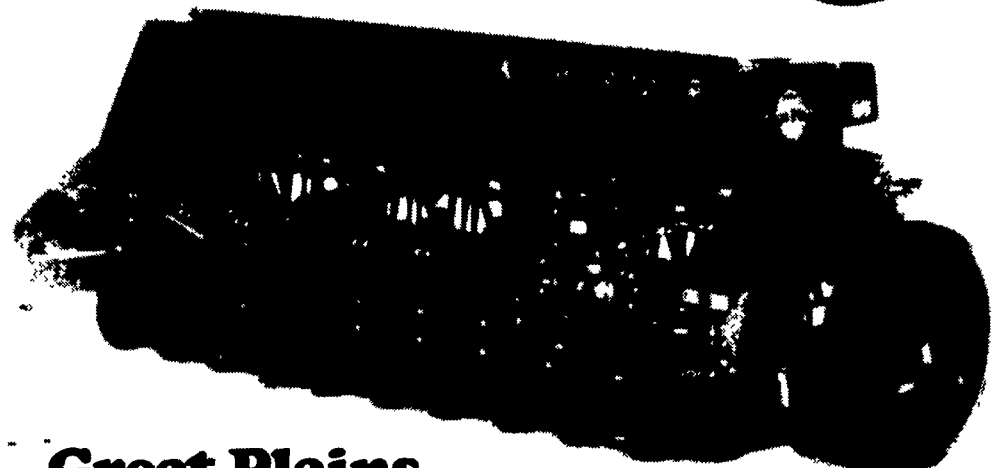
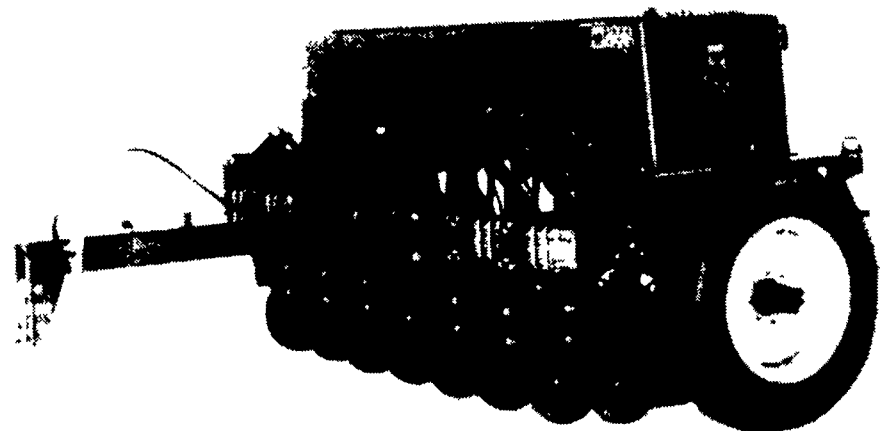
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