

Enjoying springtime right in your own backyard



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

Maybe it's just me, but I think the spring flowers are prettier and a more welcome sight than they've ever been. They seem to be saying, "things will be ok, and life goes on."

I think while the stay-at-home order is in effect, we're all finding our gardens to be a nice retreat from the crazy world. And we actually have the time to enjoy them.

I just came in from working in my landscape where I took my gas powered hedge trimmers and made quick work of cutting off all the old growth from last summer's annuals. I know I could have used my hand shears but I like the ease and uniformity of buzzing them off.

While I was at it, I also cut back several of my shrubs. I removed all of the dead seed heads from my barberries, spirea, and other summer and late fall-blooming shrubs. That made me think: if you have a Rose of Sharon and it looks like it's not as robust as some of your other shrubs, don't give up on it. They're just a little slow to get going in the spring. But they certainly put on a show in mid-summer when most things seem to be struggling with the heat of summer. I think they're kind of the ugly duckling of the shrub world.

If you have a clump of ornamental grass that's dead in the center, don't worry; they do that after a few years. It's telling you that it's time to dig it up and divide it. I know it can be a lot of work with some grass species, but it's worth the effort. You can replant the divided clumps or give them to a friend.

I love working in the soil in the early spring because the soil is somewhat soft and fluffy, especially compared to what it often becomes later in the season. If you haven't planted your spring cool weather vegetables it's still not too late to plant lettuce, spinach, and even peas. If you soak your peas overnight in water, they'll germinate quicker.

I'm not encouraging anyone to get out and go shopping right now, but you could spend the down time thinking about and planning for improvements in your landscape. You could do online homework looking for a great new tree, or even dig the hole for a new tree or shrub. You could buy and plant it at a later date. If it's not an exact fit for the hole, you can always

make adjustments when you plant. Remember, dig your hole wide, not deep. You don't want it any deeper than the root-ball of your new tree. Just be sure to cover the hole so no one, or pets, fall into it.

I know it's not the fun part of gardening but it's a great time to tackle those nasty annual weeds. Since the soil is relatively loose, it's pretty easy to pull them up by hand. They'll also hoe relatively easily. Most of these early spring weeds will go to seed after they bloom so you want to deal with them before they can reproduce. That's the trick to dealing with weeds. Always remember, weeds live to reproduce!

I know the robins and many other seasonal birds have shown up. A few hummingbirds have even been spotted. So if you have a bird feeder you might want to make sure it's filled. Birds are also mating and will begin building nests. I know a lot of people put nest-building materials out for the birds. A little straw, small sticks or pieces of grass and even a handful of dried leaves will be appreciated. Just stick to organic materials. You may want to check the Audubon Society's website for more information. It's fun to watch the birds come in and take their treasures home for the nest.

A lot of people are taking advantage of being at home by pruning their trees and fruit trees. When pruning any tree keep the "three Ds" in mind. First, remove diseased wood, damaged branches, and dead wood. When pruning a fruit tree, look for strong branches with wide branch angles. These will be better suited for holding the heavy load of fruit. Remove the branches that have a narrow space between them and the trunk. Spindly weak branches or those that are crossed and rubbing should also be removed. Try not to remove more than about 1/3 of the wood. You may need to remove the wood over a period of several years to achieve the look you desire. Apples, pears, cherries, and plums produce fruit on "spurs" that develop on wood that is at least two years old. Peaches, on the other hand, are developed on last year's growth, so keep that in mind when you're pruning. Older fruit trees, or those that are over about five years old, don't take kindly to over pruning. So go gently with them. Deciduous trees are not pruned the same as fruit trees, but that's going to have to be a topic for another article.

I hope you'll be able to make the most of these stay at home days. Our hearts and prayers go out to the many people struggling at this difficult time.

Linda Corwine McIntosh, ISA Certified Arborist, Licensed Pesticide Applicator, Advanced Master Gardener.

The Mighty Macs



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

As dawn inched closer, the familiar orange and red hemorrhaging of tomorrow began to show in the eastern sky. The wind was but a whisper as the guide shut down the 20 horsepower Mercury outboard, leaving us adrift in an open expanse of the Upper Manitou flowage in northwestern Ontario.

The sonar showed a bottom depth of 121 feet as I pitched out a blue and white jig tipped with a white rubber tail. I let the lure sink slowly into the black waters, until it hit the bottom. Closing the bail on my spinning reel, loaded with an 8-pound test monofilament line, I began the slow retrieve of my lure back to the surface, throwing in an occasional twitch with the rod tip.

About ten cranks from the bottom, it felt like I hit a log. I set the hook, only to be answered by my drag singing out as the line disappeared. Certainly no log runs like that. Clearly I was tied into a lunker of a lake trout.

Lake trout, known as lakers, mackinaw, macs or gray trout, are native to coldwater lakes in much of North America, especially Canada, Alaska and the Great Lakes, and are the largest of the trout species. The lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush* for you scientific types) is actually a char and a close relative of the brook trout.

In the wild, lake trout are very slow growing, which means without proper management, they can be susceptible to overfishing. They reach maturity at six years old and commonly live in excess of 25 years in the wild. The macs have been documented to reach up to 60 years of age.

Lake trout live in cold, well-oxygenated lakes. When the water temperatures rise in the summer months, lakers often head for deep and colder water, sometimes as deep as 200 feet.

Fall is the time of year when lake trout spawn, usually over rocky bottoms that are clear of silt and sand. The eggs drop between the gravel, which protects them from predators. Hatching begins in late winter and carries forth into spring. The young fish immediately head for deep water after hatching.

In the 1980's, lake trout were introduced to Yellowstone Lake in Yellowstone National Park. Bad idea. While it is true that lake trout are fairly easy to stock, you best know your biology before you try it.

Soon after stocking, the lakers began feeding on the



Kevin Lane, left, and yours faithfully show off a couple of the Lake Trout we caught on that Canadian adventure. It is nice to be able to catch lakers closer to home, and perhaps get paid for it. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, which are a vital part of the food chain in the area. Yellowstone cutthroat are a major food source for bears, eagles, and a score of other animals in the region.

Cutthroat populations dropped to around 10 percent of their original number in the lake by the early 2000s. Through a series of aggressive eradication measures, including gill nets and electro-shocking, the numbers are finally coming into line, and cutthroat populations are finally on the rise.

You don't have to travel to Canada to try your luck on a lake trout as we have them right here in Colorado. Stocking of lake trout began in Colorado as early as 1890, and populations are doing well.

We are fortunate to have one of the best fishing spots for lake trout right here on the western slope. Blue Mesa Reservoir has a fantastic population and is where the state record fish was caught. D. Walker set the record in 2007 with a fish weighing in at 50.35 pounds and 44.25 inches in length.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) does an excellent job of managing our population of lake trout. When the population of Macs gets too high, the kokanee salmon fishery begins to suffer, so measures must be taken.

To help manage the lake trout population at Blue Mesa, CPW is sponsoring a fishing tournament which began February 1st, and will continue through July 31. Anglers are asked to target smaller sized lake trout, those that are 24 inches in length or smaller.

From a press release by CPW, here's how the tournament works:

Anglers who catch lake trout 24 inches or smaller will remove the heads and place them in a plastic bag provided at one of three boat ramps at the reservoir: Iola, Elk Creek and Lake Fork. Heads can also be turned in at CPW's offices in Gunnison (300 W. New York Ave.) or Montrose (2300 S. Townsend Ave., U.S. Highway 550).

There is no fee to participate in the tournament.

Cash prizes will be awarded in three categories at the conclusion of the tournament:

1) CPW has tagged 23 fish in the reservoir but anglers won't know if they've caught one. CPW will scan the heads later to check for tags and those who caught them will receive \$250 for each.

2) Anglers catching the most fish: 1st place, \$1,000; 2nd place, \$500; 3rd place, \$250.

3) Anglers will be entered in a raffle for every lake trout head turned in. A total of 20 winners will be selected and each winner will receive \$200.

Research by CPW has shown that smaller lake trout, those 24 inches and under, consume the most kokanee. This is the reason for the targeting of the smaller fish in the tournament. There is no limit on the number of lake trout under 32 inches that can be caught in a day at Blue Mesa, but only one fish over 32 inches can be kept.

For more information about fishing Blue Mesa, and about the tournament, visit:

(<https://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/BlueMesaReservoirFisheryManagement.aspx>)

You may also call the Gunnison Wildlife Office at (970) 641-7060.

Canada has fantastic lake trout fishing and I caught enough of them on that trip to keep my arm sore for a few days afterwards. It is nice to have such a fine fishery closer to home and to get to be a part of the management by taking part in a tournament. Who knows, you might win.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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