

# The Right Rx For Area Gardeners

By Craig McGuire

As the weather grows warmer, Gerard Lordahl, from the New York City Council on the Environment, has some valuable advice for veteran Brooklyn gardeners and budding horticulturists venturing into their gardens following an especially bitter winter.

Lordahl discussed a variety of topics at the Bensonhurst West End Community Council's May meeting, as well as providing a gardening schedule for the month of June.

"We had a really bad winter which has done a lot of damage to your gardens, as well as street trees," said Lordahl.

"If your tree has been damaged by the excessive use of rock salt," said Lordahl, "pour six to eight gallons of water to roots every week to help dilute it."

Lordahl extended to residents precious literature and information ranging from proper care of shrubbery to essential weeding practices.

"Consistent cultivation of the soil can prevent pest and disease trouble," said Lordahl. "Extreme care, however, should be exercised so as not to injure the plant roots."

According to the information provided by

Lordahl, this month is the deadline for sowing summer-flowering plants, sunflower, marigold, cosmos, zinnia, aster, calendula, snapdragon, salvia, verbena, ageratum, and others.

"Removal of annual flower blossoms as they fade, or on a weekly basis, can help continue blooms and spur flower production," offered Lordahl.

And for rose lovers, watch out for aphids and fungus, as well as blackspot and suckers from root stock.

Lordahl also gave urban gardeners who plant a variety of shrubs important signs they should look for.

"Spring-flowering shrubs should have old, dead or leggy wood cut to the ground and/or trunk," said Lordahl. "These shrubs will bloom next year on this year's growth."

According to Lordahl, azaleas, rhododendrons, lilacs and andromedas should have dead flowers carefully removed to make room for next year's blooms.

Lordahl also gave advice on soil conditioning.

"Clay soils, familiar to vacant-lot gardeners, should be prepared with plenty of organic matter and not limed," offered Lordahl. "Soil should also

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be tested to determine the pH level."

Lordahl also advised gardeners to plant some deep roots, like sunflower. Allow some weed growth as their roots are often deep divers and can penetrate some compacted rubble soils.

"However, this is the time of year when attention must go to keeping the weeds at bay," said Lordahl. "Remember, ignoring weeds when they are small means a much bigger job [later on]."

"If you are still not ready to proceed with your

garden, a cover crop like clover, soybeans, camomile, barley or rye might be considered," said Lordahl. "Practice good mulching techniques, using leaves and/or grass clippings."

Lordahl also offered some cosmetic advice for your garden.

"June 15 is the day to set your sundial clock. The shadow should fall on 12 noon exactly," he added.

"If you want to have your soil tested free of charge," offered Lordahl, "you can send a sample to the cooperative."

The Cornell Cooperative Extension can be reached at (212) 340-2930.

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