

Don't let eagerness lead to gardening missteps

We know you're bubbling with enthusiasm, but don't make these common mistakes

By **JoAnne Skelly** ■ Extension Educator

COMMON MISTAKES: Don't trim roses before April 15 and don't expect your lawn sprinklers to provide enough water to your trees.

April 1 isn't the only day for foolishness. Although gardeners are some of my favorite people, I have witnessed many foolish mistakes they have made through the years. Some mistakes are due to lack of experience gardening in a high desert environment. Others result from a gardening itch so strong a gardener can't wait to start planting.

Here are a few common mistakes:

1. No, you can't plant tomatoes in March, no matter what the weather – unless of course you have a greenhouse, a hoop house, a high/low tunnel or other protection for these cold sensitive plants. The ground isn't warm enough; the freezes aren't over until mid-May to early June.

2. Don't prune roses until



Play your cards right and you'll have a bounty of produce.

April 15. Pruning encourages new growth. New growth is highly susceptible to freeze damage which may result in canker disease and dieback of the rose canes. Canker is less likely if you wait until mid-April to prune.

3. Whether you believe it or not, MiracleGro is a chemical fertilizer, not a magic plant growth potion. Fertilizers

contain salts. Salts can burn plants, so don't use this every week. Try adding compost around your plants and using products such as this every six weeks.

4. One emitter is not enough for a full grown tree. On planting a tree, place multiple emitters over the existing root area so that the entire

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About this series

This article is the eighth in a University of Nevada Cooperative Extension series on starting your own vegetable garden. Articles explore such topics as site selection, ordering seeds and preparing your soil. To find the complete series of articles, go to our ["Grow Your Own" page at www.unce.unr.edu](http://www.unce.unr.edu)



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Don't make these mistakes

root ball receives water. Add emitters out to the dripline as the tree grows each year. The dripline is the area under the canopy of the tree from the trunk out to the farthest branches. If water were dripping off the outermost tips of the branches to the ground, that's the dripline. The goal is to water the tree under the entire dripline all the way round to a depth of 18 inches. Tree roots grow where water and oxygen are. With decent irrigation, roots can grow four to five times the height of the tree out from the trunk.

5. Lawn watering is insufficient for watering trees. The grass gets the water, not the tree. Deep water trees or put them on a drip system. Remove the lawn under the canopy of the tree to reduce the competition for the water.



Cold tunnels help you get a start on your vegetables.

Mulch this area.

6. Don't put your trees, shrubs and flowers all on the same drip system. They all have different watering requirements. Trees can be watered deeply, to 18 inches, far less often than flowers with their relatively shallow roots.

7. Do not top a tree. This hugely damages trees. Good

pruning does not include topping. You can't contain the size of a tree by pruning. If it is too tall for its location, consider replacing it with the appropriate plant.

8. When you plant far more vegetables than your family can ever eat, share with Friends in Service Helping (FISH), Advocates to End

Domestic Violence, seniors, churches and others.

If you have gardening questions, call your local University of Nevada Cooperative Extension office: Carson City – 887-2252, Minden/Gardnerville – 782-9960 and Reno/Sparks – 784-4848. Or email me: skellyj@unce.unr.edu.



About the author

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A New Type of Garden Party

Some of us will be starting our gardens from seed. Seed-exchange and seed-starting parties are a great way to welcome spring and share resources.

Every spring my girlfriends and I gather together to start seeds, drink wine and weave garden stories. We coordinate our seed purchases in the winter, making sure we are not buying too much of one thing and not enough of

another.

This year I have increased my recycling efforts by saving the clear plastic to-go containers from my favorite deli. They function as mini-greenhouses and nine little pots fit into them perfectly. I have them all arranged in front of my south-facing window. I mist them with water every day and eagerly wait for my little seeds to germinate. Once they've germinated I open the greenhouse tops and make sure the baby plants are watered regularly.

The great advantages of starting seeds with friends are the shared resources and experiences. Starting seeds is much less intimidating if you do it with friends.

Don't worry if all of you are novice gardeners. Most seed packages have excellent instructions for sowing, thinning and transplanting. You'll have better success if you sow all



of the seeds in the packet. It's rare to have a 100 percent germination rate. If none of your friend's special heirloom tomatoes germinate, you all can donate one or two of yours.