

Enjoyable spring chores

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It's that time of year again, the season when everything is renewed and we can look positively towards the prospect of summer ahead. Spring is a beautiful time in the garden but often we don't make enough of it. On the farm, everything is so busy we don't have time to think about all the things we could be doing to improve our gardens and, as a result, the enjoyment we can experience from them.

As I look out the window I can see shoots from spring bulbs beginning to emerge. Always first up are snowdrops, closely followed by the crocus and then ultimately the various daffodils bring us right into summer.

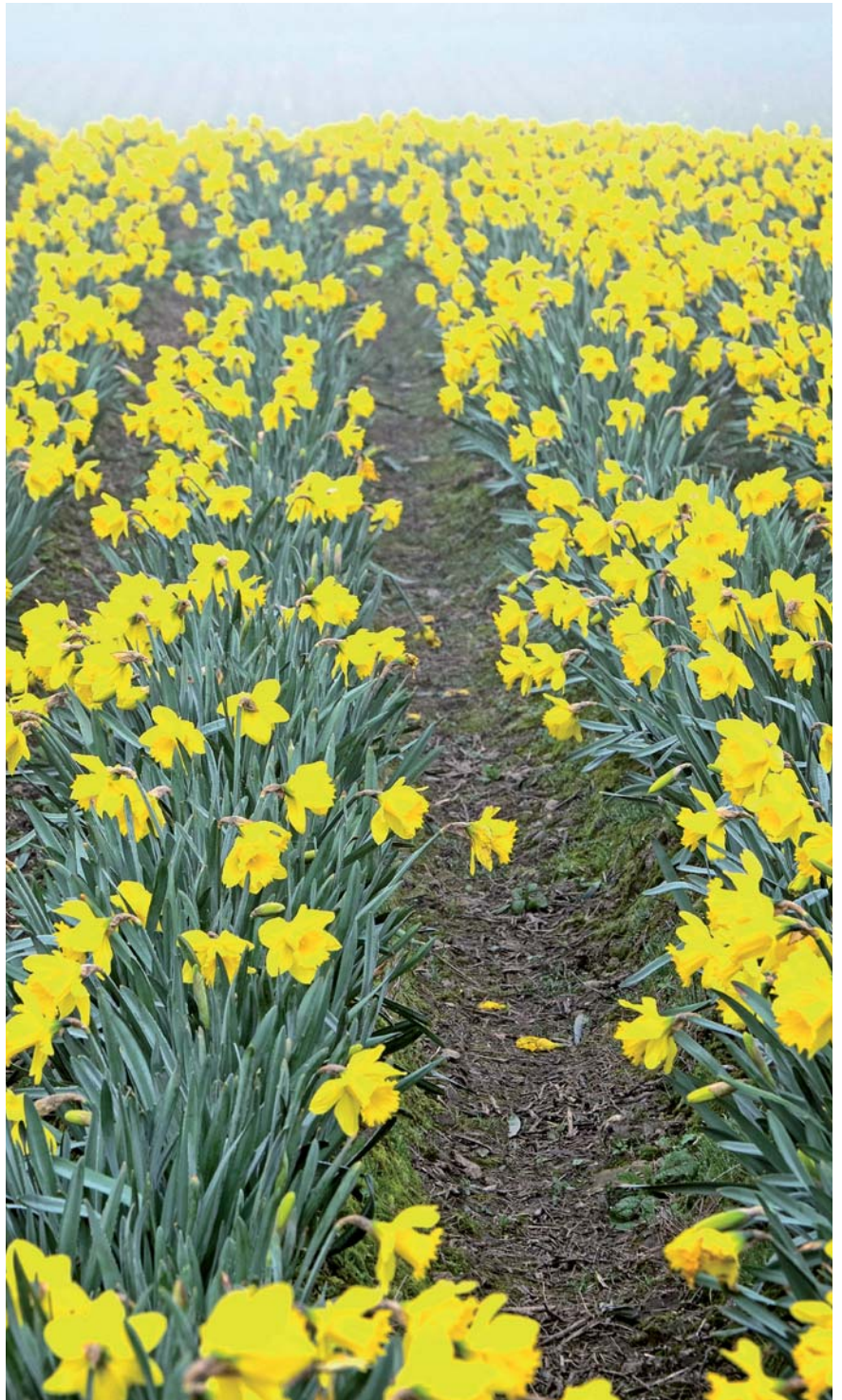
One of the many jobs we could be doing at the moment is splitting up our bulbs, in the green, either just before they flower or just after, to ensure a greater spread. A small clump of bulbs of snowdrops, for example, can be easily split at this time of year into eight or 10 smaller clumps.

I split a small clump of crocus last year and there were so many corms that they covered an area the size of a car trailer. They have flowered this year and been more visual than ever before – carpeting the ground.

Pruning is another good spring pursuit and now is the time of year to do it. I am a great believer in pruning in spring rather than winter. Roses can be pruned now, just as they are coming into growth. The saying goes that "You should let your enemy prune your roses" inferring that the more severe the cut, the better the rose.

When pruning roses, aim for a wine glass shape with an open centre and prune all old shoots out if possible, leaving three or four good young shoots to form the new plant. Shrubs also need attention. It is important to know if the shrubs you want to prune are plants which flower in spring, or later, in the summer. If they are spring flowering like Forsythia then leave pruning until after flowering.

If you prune now, you will remove too many flower buds and lose the plant's effect. Pruning once flowering



Spring is a beautiful time for flowers but often we don't make enough of it.

has passed will mean the plant has time to make sufficient new growth to allow it to flower again next spring. If the plants flower in the summer, you can prune them now as they flower on the growth they will make after this pruning.

Chore

Not wanting to make spring too much of a chore for you I will mention just one more job you might think about now. Division of your herbaceous plants and grasses. Just like the bulbs they can be divided and you can have

an abundance of new plants to plant or give away to your friends with a little effort and no cost. Dig up the plants you want to divide and break them up into manageable clumps.

Replant some in the border again and pot up the surplus in compost. It is not easy to make mistakes with division as most plants respond well to this sometimes rough treatment. You will find yourself delighting in divided agapanthus or iris or phormium and so on for the rest of that much looked forward to summer we mentioned earlier.