

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on Shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded 1.9 inches of rain last week.

Spring is here! The first day of spring was last Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup> which was marked by the arrival of the spring equinox also known as the vernal equinox. *Vernal* translates to “new” and “fresh,” and *equinox* derived from the Latin *aequus*-equal, and *nox*-night. Regardless of what the weather is doing outside, the equinox marks the official start of the spring season.

So, what does that mean? Essentially, our hours of daylight—the period of time each day between sunrise and sunset—have been growing slightly longer each day since the winter solstice in December, which is the shortest day of the year. Even though we know that after December 21st, the days start getting steadily longer, we still see more darkness than light over the course of a day. The vernal equinox marks the turning point when daylight begins to win out over darkness.

At this moment, the direct rays of the Sun are shining down on the equator, producing the effect of equal day and night. After the vernal equinox, the direct rays of the Sun migrate north of the Equator until they finally arrive at the Tropic of Cancer. The migration of the Sun’s direct rays comes to a halt on that day; this is as far north as they will go. We call this the summer solstice. It is the longest day of the year in terms of hours of daylight. After the summer solstice, the direct rays proceed to head south and the days begin to grow shorter, until the autumnal equinox; and day-night equilibrium once again.

So what does this mean for your garden? Your garden is finally ready for planting! You can still plant winter crops, such as beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, and cauliflower. And it's not too late to start that asparagus bed! You can now plant herbs, such as cilantro, dill, and parsley, but hold off on basil, until things warm up. You can now plant potatoes and radishes, too. More delicate plants, such as tomatoes and peppers can be started in pots, but only if you have a place where they can be protected from nighttime temperatures.

Hold off on beans, corn, cucumbers, melons, squash, and sweet potatoes until April, or even early May. Be sure to use plant markers, as you start seeding your garden. Things can quickly get out of hand, if you forget where you put everything! For the next three months, each day is going to give you just a little more daylight ~ what will you do with yours?

For answers to Gardening questions and more, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361.