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**Off the Shelf:**

An e-mail newsletter from the Prince William Public Library System  
March 15, 2009  
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**Spring !**

The first day of Spring will be March 21 this year, and regardless of what the weather is actually doing that day, many of us will be eager to move ahead with whatever "Spring" means to each of us.

For some, the season means "spring cleaning". After a long winter with the windows closed, boots tramping in mud and snow, and closets bursting with heavy coats and scarves, it is finally time to let in the fresh air, open up crowded spaces, and give everything a thorough cleaning. Tackling the whole house at once can be a daunting prospect. About.com has some tips for breaking the challenge down to manageable tasks:

<http://housekeeping.about.com/cs/cleaning101/a/springclnngguid.htm>

But it isn't just the inside of the house which needs attention after a long winter of cold weather, snow, and shorter daylight hours. Most yards will need a lot of TLC, and gardeners know that once the ground begins to thaw and the landscape begins "greening" up, it's time to put on the gardening gloves and start getting their hands dirty. "iVillage" has a chatroom for Virginia gardeners who want to share ideas and knowledge: <http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/vagard/>

For baseball fans, this time of year means spring training, with the regular season just around the corner. Major League Baseball's website allows fans to follow spring training and gauge how ready their favorite team is for Opening Day: <http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/schedule/>

Of course, the closest place to see MLB action is at Nationals Park. The Washington Nationals are certainly hoping that this season, the action on the field is as appealing as the stadium around it: [http://washington.nationals.mlb.com/index.jsp?c\\_id=was](http://washington.nationals.mlb.com/index.jsp?c_id=was)

But don't forget—you don't need to leave Prince William County to catch live pro baseball! They won't start play until early next month, but the Potomac Nationals will be back to defend their championship: <http://potomac.nationals.milb.com/index.jsp?sid=t436>

Baseball isn't the only sport for which March has special meaning—for many sports fans, March is all about NCAA basketball and the "March Madness" tournament. The NCAA website will make an interactive bracket available once the seeding is done and the match-ups are set: <http://www.ncaa.com/sports/m-baskbl/ncaa-m-baskbl-body.html>

The warmer weather and longer daylight hours are also a great incentive to get out of the house and explore the great outdoors. With many people scaling back or even cancelling summer vacation plans due to rough economic times, it may be a good time to consider short day trips and weekend excursions right here in Virginia and the immediate area. The official state tourism website for Virginia has many great itineraries and suggestions: <http://www.virginia.org/>

Last, but not least, don't forget that the library has many books with a variety of suggestions on how to get out and about, such as:

*Off the Beaten Path Virginia* by Judy Colbert (977.55 Vir)

A great guide to finding the out-of-the-way sites and scenic byways hurried tourists rarely have time to find.

*Natural Wonders of Virginia* by Deane and Garvey Winegar (917.55 Win)

After being stuck indoors through winter, spring is a great time to really appreciate the well-known and not-so-well-known scenery in Virginia

*Washington on Foot* edited by John J. Protopappas and Alvin R. McNeal (917.530442 Was)

A collection of 23 walking tours of our capital city.

*Off the Beaten Path Washington, DC* by William B. Whitman (917.53)

If you've lived here awhile, chances are you've seen the famous sights—now it's time to see the rest of Washington!

And, if you need some gardening tips, the library has a large collection of books, including:

*Virginia Gardener's Guide* by Jacqueline Heriteau (635.9 Her)

An older title, but a thorough resource for gardeners unfamiliar with the particular climate challenges here.

*50 High-Impact, Low-Care Garden Plants* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust (635.9 Dis)

A basic, no-nonsense guide.

And, finally, there are books on lawn care and landscaping, including:

*Lawn Geek: Tips and Tricks for the Ultimate Turf from the Guru of Grass* by Trey Rogers (635.9647 Rog)

This year, vow that the grass will **not** be greener on the other side!

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### **In The Spotlight: Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest!**

Once upon a time there was an author, Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, who actually wrote the line: "*It was a dark and stormy night...*" He continued the tremendously long sentence with "the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."

As a result, San Jose State University, Department of English, has developed that tediously, lengthy sentence into an annual writing contest. The deadline for 2009 is April 15, a date memorable for many other reasons.

Thousands of contestants enter their **single** sentence hoping to win a prize. Entries must be original and submitters are urged not to go beyond 50 or 60 words. Additional rules can be found at the website <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com>.

Why not try your hand at writing a very lengthy opening sentence for a lark. . .or as part of the contest?

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