

Spring is in the air, and a young man's fancy turns to ...

TAXES

The days get longer, the snow melts, the robins and geese return, the buds soon will bloom, the heavy coats go in the closet as the shorts and skirts come out — and it's time to file your taxes. Not everything about spring is uplifting.

The good news is that you get a couple extra days this year to file.



KEVIN O'NEILL

InSites

Because the usual tax-filing deadline, April 15, falls on a Saturday, and Emancipation Day, an obscure legal holiday observed in Washington, D.C., falls on that Monday, April 17, the deadline this year moves to Tuesday April 18.

That doesn't mean you should observe Emancipation Day by waiting until then to do your taxes.

Filing your taxes is one of those unpleasant tasks, like picking a health insurance plan or getting a colonoscopy, that you need to do even though you would rather not. In addition to the tedium of gathering records and filling out complex forms, you get

the anxiety and depression caused by the realization that you're getting a dismal return on all the money deducted from your pay.

Government help

If your taxes are fairly simple and your income is modest, there are online tools that make tax filing less of a chore. The Internal Revenue Service has several options for filing your taxes online at IRS.gov.

On the home page is a section called Hot Topics, and in that section is a link titled Electronic Filing Options. This link leads you to three e-file options for individual taxpayers (this includes married couples filing jointly). They are not for businesses or organizations.

The first option is free, online, fillable IRS forms. This is like filling out the old paper forms but on your computer. If your taxes are simple and you're comfortable doing them on your own, this is a good option. You just need to set up an account to use this method.

The second option is using online commercial software (such as TurboTax or H&R Block) that the IRS accepts. The site has a Free

File Software Lookup Tool that helps you pick which software to use. It guides you through a series of questions on your filing status and recommends software based on your answers. Your income and the complexity of your taxes are the two main factors determining whether you can file for free.

The advantage of using the commercial software over the fillable forms is that the programs do the calculations for you and offer guidance on tax rules. Some of them also allow you to file your state taxes.

The third option is using an authorized e-file provider. The IRS site gives you a list of qualified tax preparers in your area that the agency accepts. The IRS does not endorse them, and you have to pay for their services, but it's the way to go if your taxes are too complex for you to handle.

File your taxes, and then get out and enjoy springtime.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.

