

## Let's Garden!

### What TO DO in Your Garden this WINTER

*Winter is the time for planning and preparing for the spring.*

#### HOUSE PLANTS

- Let tap water stand overnight to allow chemicals in tap water to dissipate and to come to room temperature before using on plants.
- Fluffy, white mealy bugs on houseplants are easily killed by swabbing them with a cotton Q-Tip soaked in rubbing alcohol.
- Use *Safer Insecticidal Soap* spray to safely control of many insect pests on most houseplants.
- Be sure to clean the dust off of house plant leaves. The leaves will gather light more efficiently and result in better growth.
- Place humidity-loving houseplants on top of pebbles in trays or saucers filled with and water.
- Repot root-bound houseplants in late February before vigorous growth occurs. Choose a new container that is only 1 or 2 inches larger in diameter than the old pot.
- Begin to fertilize house plants in February as they show signs of new growth. Use an organic fertilizer such as *Sea Tea* or *Fish Emulsion*.
- Remember to not over water cactus and succulents reduce the danger of root rot.
- Turn your pots regularly to ensure that every side of the plant is receiving sunlight.
- Spray with *All Season Oil Spray* to kill scale and other insects.
- Pot Toppers* will cats from digging in tropical plant containers.

#### FOR THE BIRDS

- Late winter storms often bury birds' natural food supplies and a well stocked feeding station will provide a life-giving haven for our feathered friends.
- Old Christmas trees can be recycled outdoors as a feeding station for birds. String garlands of peanuts, popcorn, cranberries, fruits and suet through their boughs.
- Encourage birds to nest in your yard by providing water and by putting up bird houses. Planting suitable shrubs, trees, vines and evergreens will provide wild food sources and nesting habitat.
- Shelter, food, and nesting areas are necessary to attract and encourage birds to your garden. Birdhouses provide shelter. Feeders and berry-producing shrubs such as winterberry (deciduous holly), provide food and nesting areas.
- Select seed to attract your favorite birds. Chickadees, Cardinals, Nut Hatches, and Finches are attracted to sunflower seed and thistle. Woodpeckers enjoy suet. Try one of the *National Audubon Society Gourmet Bird Seed blends*.

#### BULBS

- Check stored summer bulbs such as dahlias, cannas and gladiolus to be sure they are not rotting or drying out. Discard any that show signs of rot.
- If you didn't get your Spring blooming bulbs planted before the ground froze, plant them immediately in individual peat pots and place the pots in flats. Set them outside where it is cold and bury the bulbs under thick blankets of leaves. Transplant them into the garden any time weather permits.
- Winter aconite (*Eranthis* sp.) and snowdrops (*Galanthus* sp.) are hardy bulbs for shady gardens that frequently push up through snow to bloom in February.
- Remove spent flowers on Amaryllis. Place in a bright sunny window so the leaves will fully develop. Keep the soil evenly moist, not soggy. Fertilize occasionally with *Sea Tea Organic Fertilizer* or *All Natural Liquid Plant Food*.

## SEEDS

- Sow early cool season vegetable seed such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and leek.
- Sow pansy seeds indoors now for spring color.
- To test germination of old seeds, roll up 10 seeds in a damp paper towel. Keep moist and warm. Check for germination in a week. If fewer than half sprout, purchase fresh seed.
- When sowing seeds indoors, be sure to use a good sterile potting soil medium such as **Fertilome Potting Mix** to prevent diseases. (Your plant is only as good as the soil it is planted in!) As soon as seeds sprout, provide ample light to encourage stocky growth.
- Sow seeds of larkspur, sweet peas, Shirley poppies and snapdragons where they are to grow outdoors now. To bloom best, these plants must sprout and begin growth well before warm weather arrives.
- Seeds of slow-growing annuals like ageratum, verbena, petunias, geraniums, coleus, impatiens and salvia may be started indoors now.

## FLOWERS

- If you have overwintered your geraniums, now is the time to take cuttings. Keep the foliage dry to avoid leaf and stem diseases.

## TREES & SHRUBS

- Use **Felco Pruning Shears or Folding Saw** to remove limbs damaged by ice or snow. These damaged limbs should be pruned as soon as detected to prevent bark from tearing and injuring the plant.
- Check all fruit trees for evidence of rodent injury to bark. Place fencing such as chicken wire around the trunks as a barrier.
- To reduce injury, allow ice to melt naturally from plants. Remove ice may damage plants further.
- Keep watering evergreens if the soil is dry and not frozen. Use cold water
- Dormant sprays such as **Fertilome Scalecide** or **Organic Oil Pharm**, can be applied to ornamental trees and shrubs in February. Temperatures should be above 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Check fruit trees for tent caterpillar egg masses. These eggs are laid on twigs in tight clusters that resemble an oblong brown lump of gum wrapped around the stem. Prune off these twigs or destroy the eggs by scratching off the clusters with your thumbnail.
- When pruning diseased branches, sterilize tools with a one-part bleach, nine parts water solution in between cuts. Dry your tools at day's end and rub them lightly with oil to prevent rusting.
- In February begin pruning fruit trees. Start with apples and pears first. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- Grapes and bramble fruits may be pruned in February.
- Established fruit trees can be fertilized once frost leaves the ground. Broadcast fertilizers over the root zone staying at least one foot from the tree trunk.

## LAWN

- To avoid injury to lawns, keep foot traffic to a minimum when soils are wet or frozen.

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Start planning your garden by scheduling a professional landscape design consultation with Steffie Littlefield of Garden Heights Nursery.
- Take an Earth Co. Basic Soil Test of your garden or new planting areas . Results will come in the mail with percentage of organic matter, and current levels of primary nutrients.
- Use birdseed, sawdust or vermiculite to gain traction on icy paths. Avoid salt or ice melts as these may injure plants and animal paws.
- Branches of pussy willow, quince, crabapple, forsythia, pear and flowering cherry may be forced indoors. Place cut stems in a vase of water and change the water every 4 days.
- Save grape vine prunings for making into attractive wreaths and other craft objects.
- Apply a light dusting of stored wood ashes around lilacs, baby's breath, asters, lilies and roses in spring. *Do not apply to acid-loving plants. Excess ashes may be composted*