

Tips for the Landscape and Garden

Tips adapted from Bob Westerfield, State Consumer Horticulturist for the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, and Walter Reeves, Retired Extension agent for DeKalb County and Saturday Morning Gardening Show Host on WSB Radio.



On mild winter days, remember to water window boxes or other outside containers planted with evergreens.

For a unified look in the landscape, construction materials and plant materials should be harmonious. Coarse-textured plants, such as rhododendrons, go better with cut stone, rock, and rustic materials. Finished woodwork and brick will work well with fine-to medium-textured landscape materials, such as astilbe or artemisia.

This is a great time to plan new construction projects and planting zones. Research what you want to plant and begin creating beds. You can still plant trees and shrubs now if the ground is not frozen. Just remember to water consistently. Mulch the areas that will be receiving new perennials and annuals later in the spring.

Check guy wires on trees planted in the fall. Stakes may need to be secured if they have been heaved out of the soil by frost. Remember to remove guy wires in spring after root growth has started. Trees that move with the wind grow stronger than those supported for too long.

For added security around the home, plant thorny shrubs on property lines and under windows. Some very thorny ones to consider include flowering quince and *Rosa rugosa*.

Add variety to your perennial border by planting some single Japanese peonies. Flowers of these peonies are held erect on stiff stems and are more resistant to damage by wind and rain than the double varieties. Also, they make attractive, long-lasting cut flowers.

Gerbera seed started in January will bloom in June. Grow in full sun, providing ample moisture.

If a few, consecutive, warm days have caused your bulbs to nose out from under protective mulch, plan to thicken the mulch layer as soon as cold weather returns to prevent freezing by exposure.

Start seeds of these and other slow-developing flowers in January or February: alyssum, coleus, dusty miller, geraniums, impatiens, marigolds, perennials, petunias, phlox, portulaca, saliva, parsley, and verbena. Bottom heat and a bright grow light close to the growing plants will encourage sturdy growth.

For easier lawn maintenance, eliminate the hard to mow spaces. Eliminate acute angles in beds and borders. Combine single trees or shrubs into a large planting area connected with ground covers or pine straw. Take time to push your mower around the new curves to see how easy it will be to mow next summer then adjust curves as needed.

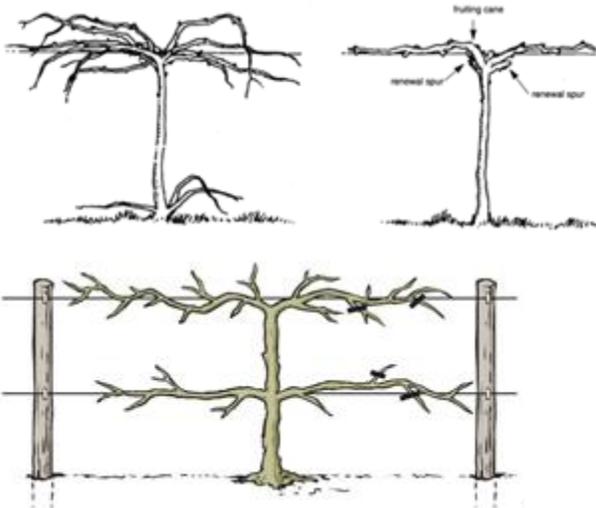
Avoid heavy traffic on dormant lawns. Dry grass is easily broken, and the crown of the plant may be severely damaged or killed.

Make dormant cuttings of roses this month. Cuttings should be five to six inches long and can be rooted in perlite or vermiculite.

It is still a good time to plant B&B, bare-root, and container-grown fruit trees this month. Water newly planted fruit trees thoroughly, even if the ground is wet, in order to settle the soil around the roots. While mulch

is important to keep out weeds and grass, do not pile it against the trunks or cover the root flare.

Prune grapes in January or February. If this job is left too late in the season, bleeding from cut ends will occur. Train vines onto a one or two wire trellis.



Check out the [Extension Publications for pruning and care of grape vines.](#)

Some mail order seed companies offer pelleted seed of lettuce, carrot, and a few other small-seeded crops. Pelleted seed has a special coating to make them larger. This is especially valuable for children and gardeners with arthritic hands, weak eyesight, or poor coordination. Wide spacing of seed helps eliminate thinning. When using pelleted seed, plant in moist soil and keep it moist because the coating must dissolve before the seed can germinate.

Review your vegetable garden plan. Perhaps a new layout and/or smaller footprint will help you keep up with weeding and care. Think about trellis options and creating raised beds to make access to produce easier. Keep bed widths under 4 feet so you can easily reach weeds and produce.

Before ordering your spring seed, do a "rag doll" germination test on those seeds left over from last year's order. Roll 10 or 20 seeds in a damp paper towel. Keep them moist and in a warm location. For most crops, germination of viable seed will occur within a week. If half the seeds germinate and you have enough left, plant twice as many as you usually do, you should get an adequate stand. Otherwise, order more seed. It is a small investment of time to ensure success and maybe save some money.

Analyze last year's planting, fertilizing, and spraying records. Make notations to reorder successful varieties and note those that did not do well to avoid a repeat of failures.

Plant asparagus, horseradish, Jerusalem artichoke, and rhubarb roots in beds well worked with compost. Mulch them heavily and fertilize as these are all heavy feeders. If you have not done so already, test the garden soil for these plants and add lime according to recommendations.

Turn under cover crops planted last fall in areas which will be used for vegetables in February and March.

Sterilize your tools, pots, and anything you use around your plants. Use one part household bleach to nine parts water. Soak for about 15 minutes, rise, and let dry. Sharpen shovels and other cutting blades. Lightly oil the metal surfaces to prevent rust.

Protect liquid insecticides from cold weather to preserve their effectiveness. If any product is stored below the manufacturer's suggested minimum storage temperature, it loses its potency. The most important factor in determining if the product is usable is the complete absence of crystals. If crystals remain after the product returns to room temperature, do not use the product. Dispose of it according to the directions on the label.

Move garden ornamentals, such as bird baths, urns, or jars, into the garage or basement to prevent damage during freezes. If containers are too large to move, cover them to prevent water collecting in them or turn them upside down during the winter so water will not collect and freeze in them causing breakage.

If you are spreading the ashes from your wood burning fire/stove in your garden, be aware that, over time, you are raising the pH of your soil. Have your soil pH tested before applying any more wood ashes.

There are many prescriptions to keep deer from nibbling ornamentals: fencing, plastic netting, repellents, sprays, hot pepper sauce, egg whites, human hair, lion or tiger manure, and even rock music. If you have a fence but the deer can still jump over it, consider adding a second lower fence 3-4 feet outside the existing fence. This should be about 3-4 feet high and can be loose netting, 2-3 lines of un-electrified tape, or

chicken wire. The idea is to confuse the deer, which have poor depth perception, and discourage the jump.



Double Deer Fence from Joe Lamp'l's garden (joegardener.com) 5' inner fence with 3' outer fence. No deer in the garden for 5 years.

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