

January Garden Activities from Your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - For winter interest in your landscape, birch trees, crape myrtle, deciduous magnolia, coral bark maple, kousa and red-twig dogwood, stewartia, and trident maple all have interesting bark.

For winter blooms, plant flowering quince, witch hazel, and leatherleaf mahonia.

Prune trees and shrubs while they are dormant with the exception of those that bloom in the spring. They should be pruned just after they bloom. Evergreen shrubs can also be pruned late this month.

Be sure to water evergreens before the soil freezes if severe weather is forecast, because the roots are not able to take up water when the soil is frozen.

When pruning, make sure that your tools are sharp. For large branches, first cut through the bark on the underside of the limb to be pruned to keep it from tearing the bark. Next, cut from the top, close but not flush with the trunk. The swelling at the base of each branch is the branch collar and this should not be cut.

Plant ornamental trees and shrubs this month if the soil is not frozen.

Watch for borers, over-wintering insects, and scale on broadleaf evergreen trees, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, and perennials. Apply dormant oil spray when these pests are detected, always following label directions.

Water trees and shrubs during dry periods.

Prune nandinas any time between now and early spring by cutting out one third of the oldest canes.

Shrubs such as forsythia, spirea, and kerria can be divided now.

Flowerbeds - Watch for poison ivy when working outdoors. Even though the vine is leafless this time of the year, the branches can still cause a powerful reaction if accidentally touched.

If you have *Helleborus orientalis* (Lenten rose) planted in your garden – look for blooms beginning now to mid-spring.

To encourage new blooms, deadhead pansies (remove spent blossoms) and fertilize monthly with fertilizer that contains nitrate nitrogen (best for plants growing in cold soils).

Water outside containers planted with pansies and evergreens regularly.

Vegetables - If you have not already done so, prepare your vegetable garden area for spring planting when the ground is frost free and not soggy. Apply lime if your soil test indicates that you should. Contact your County Extension office for soil test directions.

The New Year is an exciting time to reevaluate your life and your garden. Cold days are great for sitting by a fire and planning your spring landscape changes and vegetable garden.

Request mail-order seed and plant catalogs and order seeds for starting indoors.

If the ground is dry, till soil in your vegetable garden to help eliminate insects and weeds and incorporate manure or compost to get the soil in good shape for spring plantings.

Houseplants - Remove amaryllis stems with the faded blooms. Keep it indoors with your houseplants then plant it outdoors in May.

Use water at room temperature when watering houseplants. Spray houseplants with insecticidal soap if you detect spider mites, mealy bugs, or scale on the leaves, always following label directions.

Give houseplants a half turn every month so they do not become misshapen.

Repot houseplants as needed and fertilize using a water-soluble fertilizer at eight-week intervals at half the recommended strength.

Miscellaneous - Now is a good time to install edgings around flowerbeds and construct walls, terraces, and walkways, when weather permits.

Instead of salt, use sand on icy walks and driveways. Salt can damage plants and lawns.

Have your lawnmower serviced so it will be ready when you are for spring grass cutting.

Inventory your garden tools and replace or repair as necessary. Sharpen your tools and clean rust from them with steel wool. Coat blades with a light oil and rub linseed oil on wooden handles to help preserve them.

Chop unwanted bamboo and English ivy to the ground. Follow up with weed killer on the leaves in April. More than one application of weed killer may be necessary, always follow label directions.

Jo Anne Allen
Master Gardener Extension Volunteer