



January Gardening Tips

Click on highlighted links for additional information

Annuals and Perennials

- Check for frost heaving on perennials during thaws and press back into place. Cover the crowns with extra mulch as necessary.
- Start seeds of pansies, dusty miller, browallia, begonias, snapdragons, and delphiniums indoors under lights.

Education and Events

- Winter is a good time to sign up for gardening classes or seminars offered by many garden centers or town recreation office or through the UConn Master Gardener Program.

Houseplants

- On frigid nights protect indoor plants from freezing; move them away from window panes or cover panes with a shade or cardboard.
- Houseplants with large leaves and smooth foliage such as philodendrons, dracaena and rubber plant benefit if their leaves are washed at intervals to remove dust and grime, helping keep the leaf pores open.
- During the winter most homes are too dry for houseplants. Humidity may be increased by placing plants on trays lined with pebbles and filled with water to within one half inch of the base of the pot. Run a humidifier or if you heat with wood, keep a pot of water on the stove. The added moisture will be healthier for you as well as your plants.
- Turn and prune houseplants regularly to keep them shapely. Pinch back new growth to promote bushy plants. Houseplants will benefit from fertilizer applications once or twice this winter.
- Houseplants such as geranium that grow tall and leggy probably need supplemental light. Move them to a brighter location or consider investing in fluorescent lights. Or cut them back by half, repot the plants in fresh soil and set them in a cool, bright window.
- The cyclamen with its unique blossoms needs to be kept cool and evenly moist. High temperatures, too little water, or too low light may cause leaves to yellow and drop. With proper care the plant should continue to bloom for six to eight weeks.
- Poinsettias need good drainage, so if the pot is still wrapped in foil, remove the foil or make a hole in the bottom to allow the water to drain out. Keep soil moist, but don't overwater. Place your plant in a cool (60 to 65° F) location that gets plenty of light. Keep out of warm or cool drafts, and fertilize once a month to prolong the life of the foliage and bracts.
- Check all house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine that they are not harboring any pests. Inspect under leaves for infestations of whitefly and spider mites; check between

leaves and stems for white, cottony mealybugs, and look under leaves and on stems for scale insects. Apply insecticidal soap or another low toxicity insecticide, crush or brush off as appropriate.

- Spider mites may be a problem for your houseplants because of the dry indoor air. Look for the symptoms they cause- stippling on leaves and fine webbing on new growth. Spray them with insecticidal soap 2 to 3 times a week to kill the mites or small plants can be put over the sink and blasted with water. Remove pests by hand and spray with insecticidal soap if needed.

In the Vegetable Garden

- Do not wait until late in the winter to order seeds as many of the seed companies most popular varieties sell out early.
- When placing your seed and plant orders keep in mind that many seeds have improved insect and/or disease resistance. Watch also for drought-tolerant types. Our fact sheet Vegetable Garden: Basics and Plant Selection has some useful suggestions.
- To determine how many seeds to order, map out your garden on graph paper, allowing adequate space between rows and ample room for vining crops such as pumpkins and winter squash.
- When planning your vegetable garden, remember to rotate crops.
- Plan your seed order with a friend or neighbor so that you can sample more varieties as well as save on shipping costs.
- At month's end, start seeds of onions, leeks, broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower indoors under lights.
- Check stored fruits and vegetables such as potatoes and apples for bad spots which may lead to decay. Remove and use those which show signs of spoiling. Separate others into slotted trays or bins to increase air circulation and reduce decay possibilities.

Insects

- Check all house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine that they are not harboring any pests. Inspect under leaves and stems for white, cottony mealybugs, and look under leaves and on stems for scale insects. Apply insecticidal soap or another low toxicity insecticide, crush or brush off as appropriate.
- Spider mites may be a problem for your houseplants because of the dry indoor air. Look for the symptoms they cause- stippling on leaves and fine webbing on new growth. Spray them with insecticidal soap 2 to 3 times a week to kill the mites or small plants can be put over the sink and blasted with water. Remove pests by hand and spray with insecticidal soap if needed.
- Check for tan gypsy moth egg masses on tree trunks and branches. Scrape or brush off and destroy.
- To control bagworm on shrubs and trees, look for the small stick-covered 'bags' and remove by hand.

Landscape and Lawns

Fruits

- Protect young fruit trees from hungry mice that can chew the bark off at the soil line, weakening and possibly killing the trees. Keep mulch several inches from trunks to prevent mice from hiding under it. Consider putting wire-screen mouse guards around the trunks of the trees.

Lawns

- Try to stay off lawn areas during winter months as it can damage grass crowns.
- Use notes, photos, and sketches to assess areas which need new plants, dividing or a major overhaul. Study the "skeleton" of your landscape and decide where to put new structures, such as pathways and arbors.

Trees and Shrubs

- Brush snow from evergreens as soon as possible after a storm. Use a broom in an upward, sweeping motion. Serious damage may be caused by heavy snow or ice accumulating on the branches.

- Analyze last year's planting, fertilizing and spraying records. When using salt to melt ice on walks and driveways, spread it carefully to avoid damage to nearby shrubs. Consider using sand or sawdust instead.
- After the snow melts, flush the area around the roots exposed to salt with fresh water.
- Prop up ice covered branches and wait for the ice to melt instead of attempting to remove it.
- Prune away storm-damaged branches promptly to prevent tearing of the bark. When pruning large limbs, always undercut first. This means to cut from the bottom up, one-third of the way through the limb, then finish by cutting from the top. The undercut keeps the limb from splitting and breaking off, which could damage the trunk and become an entryway for insects and diseases. Do not cut flush to the trunk as the collar or enlarged base of a branch produces hormones that help heal wounds.
- When you are finished with holiday evergreen boughs, use them to mulch tender perennials and shrubs.
- Renew anti-desiccant sprays on broad-leaved evergreens.
- Inspect ornamental trees and shrubs for scale insects while leafless.
- Use wood ashes from the fireplace as a good source of potash. Keep in mind the pH of wood ashes is 11 so only use them on areas where the pH needs to be raised.
- Check for tan gypsy moth egg masses on tree trunks and branches. Scrape or brush off and destroy.
- Remove and destroy infested foliage on arborvitae and juniper to control leaf miner. Look for browned foliage that is hollowed out to detect the problem.
- To control bagworm on shrubs and trees, look for the small stick-covered 'bags' and remove by hand.
- Select pest-resistant cultivars or species where possible when planning the year's garden. Choose varieties appropriate to the site.

Wildlife

- Feed the birds regularly and see that they have a supply of clean water. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts, and bread crumbs as well as bird seed.
- Clean bird feeders and baths regularly to avoid the spread of avian diseases. Disinfect feeders and baths monthly with a solution of 1-part bleach to 9-parts water. Clean droppings off and make sure the bird food isn't moldy.
- Consider getting a heater for the bird bath.

Yard Tools and Accessories

- Bring pruning tools inside and clean them for the upcoming season. Disassemble hand pruners, and loppers. Sharpen the blades, oil the levers, and remove any rust.
- Paint the handles of garden tools red or orange. This will preserve the wood and make the tools easier to locate when you lay them down in the garden or on the lawn.
- Move garden ornaments such as urns or jars into the garage or basement to prevent damage during the cold winter season. 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.
- Clean crusty pots by soaking them in vinegar for a few hours. Heavily crusted pots might require additional scrubbing with steel wool. Rinse thoroughly and then to sterilize, dip in a 1:10 bleach to water solution for a few minutes. Rinse and dry.

Despite good cultural practices, pests and diseases at times may appear. Chemical control should be used only after all other methods have failed.

For pesticide information please call UConn Home and Garden Education Center weekdays, in Connecticut call toll free 877-486-6271. Out of state call 860-486-6271

Revised by the UConn Home and Garden Education Center 2017

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Dean of the College, Cooperative Extension System, University of Connecticut, Storrs. The Connecticut Cooperative Extension System is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, Stop Code 9410, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Dean of the College, Cooperative Extension System, University of Connecticut, Storrs. The Connecticut Cooperative Extension System is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, Stop Code 9410, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964.