February Gardening Tips
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Annuals and Perennials
- This is the time to start small-seeded flowers such as begonias and petunias.
- Surprise your favorite relative or friend with a floral bouquet on St. Valentine's Day.
- Root geranium cuttings for use later in the season.

Education and Events
- Subscribe to a new gardening magazine.
- Sign up for gardening classes or seminars offered by many garden centers or town recreation office or through the UConn Master Gardener Program.

Houseplants
- Provide houseplants with increased humidity; mist often or place plants over a tray of moist pebbles.
- When buying houseplants in winter, be sure to wrap them well for the trip home and, if possible warm up the car. This prevents the foliage from freezing and protects tropics from drafts.
- Continue to clean leaves of large and smooth leaved houseplants like dracaena, philodendron, ficus, etc.
- Clean clay pots by soaking overnight in a solution of 1-gallon water and 1 cup of vinegar. Scrub to remove deposits. Repeat if necessary.
- Check your stored plants such as fuchsias and geraniums. Usually they need a light watering once a week depending on their storage temperature.
- If you potted bulbs for forcing last fall, check their progress. Soil should be barely moist. If tips have sprouted and have a few inches of growth, bring the pot into a cool, bright room (50 to 60 degrees F). Gradually expose the plant to increasing warmth, indirect sunlight, and increased watering. Feed once a week with half-strength houseplant fertilizer. To help the stems grow straight, turn the pot every day. When buds and foliage are fully developed, bring into full sunlight, and enjoy!
- Cut back geraniums, hibiscus, and other houseplants for repotting next month.
- Begin fertilizing houseplants with a water-soluble fertilizer as they resume active growth.
- If house plants are growing tall and leggy, they probably need supplemental light. Use fluorescent lights to help compensate for short days.
- Keep pinching over-wintering coleus, they tolerate major cutting back and routine pinching to encourage bushy growth. New plants can be propagated with the cuttings.

In the Vegetable Garden
- Turn the compost pile during any stretches of mild weather.
- Purchase seed flats, containers, and peat pellets. Check your cold frame for needed repairs.
- It's also a good time to finish up your seed order, if you haven't done so already.
- Start celery, leek, or onion transplants since these slow growers need several months before they are ready to set out.
- If you're starting seeds under fluorescent lights, check the light tubes for signs of age. Dark rings on the ends of tubes means they should be replaced. Dispose of properly.
- Plant leek and onion seeds now. They need 10 to 12 weeks of growth before going in the garden.
Select pest-resistant cultivars or species where possible when planning the year's garden. Choose varieties appropriate to the site.

Insects
- Check for tan gypsy moth egg masses on tree trunks and branches. Scrape or brush off egg masses and destroy.
- To control bagworm on shrubs and trees, look for the small stick-covered bags (above image) and remove them by hand.
- Inspect hemlocks for woolly adelgid. Plan to apply a dormant horticultural oil treatment in April if the cottony egg masses are found at the base of needles.

Landscape and Lawns

Fruits
- Prune grape vines at the end of the month. Planning to grow your own native edibles?
- Now is the time to order bare-root fruit trees. Consider placing an order from one of the CT Conservation Districts Spring Plant sales.
- This is the time to prune currants. On a mild day, remove all deadwood and low shoots that are over 3 years old. Prune to an outward-facing bud. Prune apple and pear trees as the weather allows.

Lawns
- When using salt to melt ice on walks and driveways, spread it carefully to avoid damage to lawns. Consider using sand or sawdust instead. After the snow melts, flush the area around the roots exposed to salt with fresh water.

Trees and Shrubs
- To control bagworm on shrubs and trees, look for the small stick-covered bags (above image) and remove them by hand.
- Check for tan gypsy moth egg masses on tree trunks and branches. Scrape or brush off egg masses and destroy.
- 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.
- Check on winter plant protection; add mulch and adjust plant stakes as necessary.
- Brighten up your home by forcing branches of spring-flowering trees such as forsythia, dogwood, and crabapple to bloom indoors. Cut the branches and place them in a bucket or vase of warm water.
- Take a walk around the garden to check for ice and snow damage to shrubs, evergreens, and trees.
- If you are overwintering plants into your garage or cellar, check the soil to see if it needs water. If the soil is frozen, it may be too cold of a spot.
- Protect broadleaf evergreen shrubs such as mountain laurel and rhododendron with anti-transparent sprays. Apply during February thaw.
- Inspect hemlocks for woolly adelgid. Plan to apply a dormant horticultural oil treatment in April if the cottony egg masses are found at the base of needles.

Wildlife
- Keep bird feeders filled throughout winter.
- February is a great time to build a birdhouse. The size of the entrance must be proportionate to the type of bird you want to attract. Provide a rough surface both inside and outside the entrance to facilitate access and egress. In addition, ventilation holes are important. Put up the birdhouse in the spring, placing it at least six feet off the ground to keep cats, raccoons, and other predators away. Protective collar hung just below the birdhouse also deters unwelcome visitors.

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