

February Garden Tips

Dealing with snow:

- Use plant- and pet-friendly salt (potassium- or calcium-based products) on your driveway and sidewalk. It does less damage to plants and is less harmful to pets. Another option to consider is sand.
- Prune storm-damaged branches as soon as possible to prevent further injury to the bark.
- Heavy, wet snow can damage branches of trees and shrubs. Gently remove snow with a broom. If the snow has frozen to branches, do not try to remove it or you may break branches.
- Snow removed from your driveway and sidewalks can be piled in the garden to help insulate perennials. Do not put any snow treated with salt in the garden or it will harm perennials.

In the winter garden:

- Check perennials for frost heaving. Lightly press them back into the soil and cover with mulch if necessary.
- Inspect trees and shrubs periodically for damage from rabbits or deer. If signs of assault are evident, wrap trunks with deer fencing or hardware cloth.
- If weather allows, monitor leafless trees and shrubs for scale insects. They will be easier to spot without the cover of foliage. Spray with dormant oil before buds break if necessary.
- Keep an eye out for the egg cases of the Eastern tent caterpillar. Most often found on apple and crabapple, hawthorn and mountain ash, and flowering cherry trees, the egg cases look like shiny brown bands encircling twigs.
- During a February thaw, water evergreen trees and shrubs.
- Prune a few branches from spring-flowering trees and shrubs to force indoors. Good choices for forcing include crabapple, dogwood, flowering cherry, forsythia, pussy willow, quince, redbud and serviceberry.
- If the weather is cold, prune trees like maples, willows, beech and birches. These trees ooze sap excessively when pruned during warm spells.
- Wait to prune spring-flowering trees until have they bloom.
- Prune summer and fall-blooming shrubs.
- Prune fruit trees toward the end of the month.
- At the end of February, start seeds for annuals that need eight to ten weeks before planting outside. Annuals include impatiens, flowering vinca, lobelia, salvia, verbena and wax begonia.
- Apply a fungicide to trees with a recurring problem with apple scab. There are many fungicides from which to choose or just be sure to follow the directions on the product label.
- Avoid walking on the lawn during a thaw.

Wildlife:

- Keep birdfeeders filled and provide birds with a source of fresh water. Birds need water for drinking and bathing. Clean feathers provide the best insulation.
- If you have a pond with goldfish or koi, make sure a pump continues to oxygenate water and an area stays unfrozen so gases can escape. Never bang on the ice or it may harm fish.

Gardening indoors:

- To keep Valentine's Day flowers beautiful as long as possible, place them in tepid water as soon as you can. Make a fresh angled cut on each stem while it is under water. Use the packet of preservative that comes with the flowers. Remove any foliage that might be under water. Keep the arrangement out of direct sunlight and away from drafts.
- Grow microgreens in a sunny window.
- Get seed-starting supplies ready for planting. Sterilize them in solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.
- Force bulbs to bloom indoors. Paperwhites are easy to force.
- Check on canna and dahlia tubers. Very lightly mist if they are drying out. Discard any damaged tubers.
- Periodically inspect houseplants for insect pests. Look for evidence of spider mites (webbing where leaves are attached to stems and stippled foliage), mealybugs (look like little cotton puffs) and whitefly (tiny, white moth-like insects on undersides of leaves).
- Give houseplants the increased humidity they prefer. Mist them or place them on a water-filled tray of pebbles.
- Continue to let most houseplants dry between waterings. In this period of slow growth, they require less water.
- Repot houseplants that have become root-bound.

Gardening from the couch:

- Plan your vegetable garden. Refer to last year's notes and make wish lists of varieties you'd like to grow. Create a map rotating crops from last year's garden.
- Take photos of the view from your windows. Plan now how to improve them. Do they need focal points, trees or large shrubs to frame the view, or evergreens or shrubs with beautiful bark to add color to the scene? Make notes ó don't count on your memory.
- If you took photos of perennial borders last season, note which perennials need to be moved or divided. If there are any less-than-satisfactory spaces, spend time researching which perennials or small shrubs might enhance the scene.
- Read garden books and magazines. They'll keep you inspired!
- Attend classes and seminars. Check newspapers, magazines and extension websites for events in your town.