

The Garden Helper

Helping Gardeners Grow Their Dreams since 1997

The month of December has most people scurrying about with a long list of 'gotta-dos'. Probably the last thing on anyone's mind is working in the garden. Fortunately, the list of gardening 'to-dos' for this month is more like a list of 'don't-dos'. If you have been keeping up with your gardening **tasks for the last few months**, you should be able to take it pretty easy this month; (*at least in the garden.*) There are a few things to keep an eye on, and a few optional things you can do in the garden. Your biggest concern will probably be tending to your house plants. This year, consider purchasing a **living Christmas tree** for your home. They really aren't that much more expensive than a cut tree. This is an excellent way to improve your landscape, and at the same time, save a tree. Before bringing a living tree into the house, water it thoroughly. Living Christmas trees should not be kept in the house for any longer than 10 days.

Annuals, Perennials, and bulbs

If you potted up some bulbs, such as hyacinths, daffodils or tulips, last September for **winter forcing**, keep an eye on them. Make sure they remain moist, and in the dark until they have established their root systems. It is possible that they have already filled their containers with roots and that the new top growth has begun. If this is so, bring them into the house and set them in a cool room, in indirect light. After a week or so, move them into bright light, and watch them go to town! Check on any corms and tubers which you dug up, and stored this fall. Remove and discard any which show signs of disease or rot.

Shrubs and Trees

Winter rains tend to make you forget about watering your garden. However, plants and shrubs which are growing beneath large evergreens or under the eaves of the house, may be bone dry by this time. Lack of water in the cold winter months can be fatal to many of these plants. A quick check will let you know if you need to do a little winter watering. If there is a sudden drop in the temperature, **provide extra protection** for your more tender flowering plants like Rhododendrons, Camellias, Azaleas and Daphne. You can provide temporary, emergency protection by driving in three or four stakes around the plant, and then simply covering the plant with some type of cloth, like burlap, a sheet or an old blanket. Don't let this material come into direct contact with the leaves of the plant. Remove the cover completely, as soon as the weather moderates. December is a good month to **take cuttings** of rhododendrons, azaleas, and other evergreen shrubs. The cutting should be taken from new tip growth, and kept in bright light, at about 70 degrees f.

Lawn Care *Stay off frozen grass!!!*

House Plant Care

Glossy leaved house plants such as **Philodendrons**, **Rubber plants**, and **Palms** should be sponged off periodically, to allow them to breathe. Plants which have fuzzy, textured, or other non-glossy type leaves should be set in the sink and sprayed gently with room temperature water, until the dust is cleaned away. Be sure that the foliage is allowed to dry completely.

Provide your house plants with extra humidity by grouping plants together, or by setting the pots on leak-proof trays filled with moistened pebbles. If you successfully kept last year's plants alive, and have been keeping it in 14 hours of darkness since **September**, your **Poinsettias** and **Christmas cactus** should be ready bring back into the living room by December first. With the proper care, these Christmas plants will remain beautiful for many weeks.

- They prefer to be kept on the cool side, 65-70 degrees during the day, 55-60 at night.
- Keep them in bright, natural light whenever possible.
- Keep them away from heat sources.
- Keep them out of drafts.
- Be sure to water them when they become dry.
- Never allow them to stand in water for more than an hour.

Odds and ends

Take care of our feathered friends! Keep your bird feeder filled, especially when there is snow on the ground.

Don't let your hose freeze and burst. Stretch it out with both ends open, to allow the water to drain completely. Coil it up and put it away. Make sure your outdoor faucets are covered to protect them from freezing.

***When you go out partying this season.....
PLEASE bring along a designated driver, or take a cab.***

Above all else, have a happy and SAFE holiday season!