



The holidays are over, and the weather is chilly if not downright cold. Yet cold weather should not stop gardeners from gardening and thinking about gardening.

### CONTAINER PLANTS

Check all house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine they are pest-free. Plant growth is slow in winter, so keep fertilization to a minimum.

It may look decorative, but don't place a plant on top of the television set. This location is too warm, and in most homes, it is too far away from windows to provide adequate light.

Rotate and prune your plants as needed and pinch back new growth to promote bushy foliage. Remember, over-watering indoor plants encourages root rot. Water only when the soil is dry to the touch. Most indoor plants like to be fine misted with water. Humidity can be increased by placing plants on trays lined with pebbles and filled with water.

When dusting the furniture, consider dusting the plants. With the short days of winter, light reduction must remain at a minimum. Wipe dust from broad-leaf plants at regular intervals using a cloth dampened with plain water.

### TREES AND SHRUBS

When choosing a location for new shrubs and trees, remember spots that are sunny now might be shady in the spring or summer. Ornamentals like azaleas, camellias, dogwood, mahonia and leucothoe prefer shade.

For a unified look in the landscape, construction materials and plant materials should be harmonious. Coarse-textured plants, such as rhododendrons, go better with cut stone, rock and rustic materials. Finished woodwork and brick suit fine- to medium-textured landscape materials like astilbe or artemisia.

For added security around the home, plant thorny shrubs on property lines and under windows. Some very thorny ones to consider include pyracantha, tri-foliate orange, rosa rugosa and thorny elaeagnus. Late winter is a good time to plant.

Now is a good time to assess the energy

efficiency of your landscape. Do you have evergreen trees or shrubs blocking a window where the sun's warmth would be welcome? Consider replacing them with a deciduous plant that would let sun in during the winter, but cast cooling shade in the summer.

### FLOWERS

Gardeners who want to have tuberous begonias for summer-long flowering in pots, beds, or hanging baskets, should start the tubers indoors in late February or early March. Sprout the tubers by placing them hollow side up and fairly close together in shallow, well-drained pans. Use a mix of equal parts perlite, sphagnum, peat moss and vermiculite. An alternative is chopped sphagnum moss and perlite. The medium should be kept damp (not soggy) in a shady window with a temperature in the lower 60s. Transplant the tubers into pots or baskets when growth starts, normally within 3 weeks. Place outside only after all threat of frost has passed.

Design a flower bed for a shady area. Plan to try impatiens, foxglove or begonia.

Don't remove mulch from perennials too early. A warm day may make you think spring is almost here, but there may be more cold weather ahead to come.

Watch for signs of growth in early spring bulbs. When foliage is 1-inch high, gradually start removing mulch. Cloudy days are best for the initial exposure of the leaves to strong sunlight which can burn tender foliage.

Pinch off early buds from developing pansies to encourage plants to branch and form more buds.

### VEGETABLES

Now is the time to think about the quick crops. Quick crops are good vegetables for children to grow because they are ready to pick so soon after sowing. But they are an effective tonic for the rest of us as well. Not only do they jump-start the season in the kitchen garden, quick-crops often are the first homegrown vegetables to make it to table after a winter of grocery-store produce. And first always tastes best.

Radishes are one of only a handful of vegetables a gardener can sow from seed at the beginning of a month and harvest by month's end. The only way to get a bunch of

radishes faster is to bring one home from the supermarket. Other quick-crops include baby salad greens, turnips and scallions. Because all these sprinters are cool season crops, the ideal window of opportunity for sowing them is brief.

As soon as they arrive, quick-crops are gone. With shade cloth and misting, it's possible to squeak out another week or two, but it is much simpler to tack those extra days onto the beginning of the new season with raised beds.

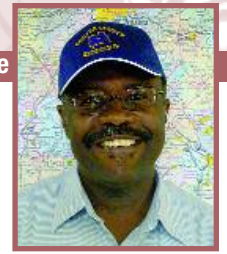
For peak flavor and freshness, practice successive sowing. Don't hesitate. Just pull out plants that have passed their prime and sow fresh seed in their place.

### ROSES

It's time to think about planting roses and sprucing up the ones you already have. Following are some things to remember if you are thinking about roses.

- If you're not especially dedicated to maintenance, plant non-hybrids.
- When cutting roses, cut back to the first 5-leaf cluster.
- Develop a fertilization program: roses are heavy feeders.
- Select roses only for your USDA Hardiness Zone.
- Plant only what you can take care of.
- Be neat and clean. Pick up all diseased leaves and cuttings and dispose of them. This will make a difference.
- Use soaker hoses for the best watering program.
- When you cut roses, be sure to trim the bottom leaves before putting in a vase. This practice will prevent bacterial growth. Change water daily.
- Baking soda can be used if black spot develops on growing roses. Mix 2 teaspoons baking soda and a few drops liquid soap in 1 gallon of water. Use this to spray in the early mornings. Use every 4-5 days until the weather dries up and black spot disappears.
- Be sure to eliminate any suckers growing from below a graft. They will choke out the grafted rose.

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### FRUITS AND NUTS

It happened in the blink of an eye. How did the palm reader miss it? A 35- to 40-percent pecan crop in 2006 was followed by a 100 percent crop in 2007. The year was not perfect for many gardens, but it was perfect for a pecan crop.

What can be done in February as the new pecan season approaches? Management should be high priority for individual trees and orchards. Here are some things to do:

–Remove broken limbs that are still attached to trees. Make appropriate pruning cuts, especially to the main trunk. Remember, a pecan tree cannot be grown overnight. It is important to provide the right care to prolong its life for productivity.

–February is the ideal time for fertilizing. A tree should produce six inches of terminal growth each year. If no soil test is available, then broadcast four pounds of a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 for every inch of the trunk diameter. Measure the diameter four feet from the ground. Remove and destroy damaged limbs from the orchards. Insects and disease will over-winter there.

–Now is the time backyard fruit trees are plentiful at garden centers. Select varieties recommended for your zone. And remember: a fruit tree that produced fruit you liked in North Carolina might not produce so well in Georgia. Insect and disease resistance, high productivity, good taste, usefulness for canning and preserving, and shelf life are important aspects to consider before selecting a tree. Ask your neighbor or a local garden expert for advice.

### VEGETABLES

Nothing tastes better than fresh home-grown vegetables. Getting them started is the key to a successful vegetable garden. Tips for growing vegetables include these:

–Perform a soil test. A soil test determines the soil pH of soil. Is the soil acidic or alkaline? Dolomitic Limestone

can be added to correct a low pH. Sulfur can help lower pH.

–Select a site receiving at least six hours of sunlight.

–A garden near the house makes it easier to monitor insects, diseases, deer and other crop dangers.

–Locate the garden near a water supply.

–Reduce disease buildup by rotating the garden or crops to a new site each year.

–Make a family garden plan. Only plant what you can manage.

–Select certified seeds.

–Vegetables recommended for planting in February include asparagus, beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrot, collard, kale, lettuce, mustard, onion, garden peas, Irish potato, radish, spinach and turnips.

–Remove and destroy old vegetable plants remaining from the fall garden.

–To help with pollination, plant bee-attractive plants around the garden site.

–To keep wildlife out of the garden, a fence of appropriate size might be justified. For rabbits, run a 24- to 30-inch fence or hot wire at 6 to 12 inches. A seven- or eight-foot fence might be suitable for deer.

### FLOWERS

Are your holiday gift plants suffering from flu-like symptoms or a wilt virus? Gift plants show such symptoms this time of year. What, if anything, can be done to perk them up?

#### Ways to Revive Holiday Gift Plants:

##### Poinsettia

1.A poinsettia with brown leaves, crinkled stems, no green tissue and dark colored roots should be diagnosed as dead. Throw it in the compost pile.

2.Holiday gift wrapping is responsible for killing many poinsettias. The wrapping holds water. Water stands and keeps the roots saturated. Either remove the wrapping or punch drain holes underneath.

### African Violet

1. African violets can tolerate slightly dry conditions and not suffer. If soil looks dry, press or wiggle the index finger about one inch into the soil. If the soil feels moist, do not apply water.

2. A sign of overwatering occurs when the stem and leaf looks transparent, feels mushy to the touch, or shows a brownish color.

### LAWN

**Question:** What grows in lawns when temperatures cool?

**Answer:** Weeds, weeds and more weeds. The presence of weeds indicates poor growing conditions for the lawn grass. Most people wait until weeds are present, but the best time to manage weeds is before they germinate.

February 15th through March 5th is the time to apply pre-emergence herbicides for lawns in the South. Crabgrass is one of the annual grasses to control at this time. For annual weeds, a pre-emergence herbicide application should be done around October 1-15 in the South.

Post-emergence herbicides work best when applied to small weeds when the temperature is between of 60 and 90 degrees. Injury or death may occur to turf when herbicides are applied at high temperatures or in drought conditions. Expect poor weed control at such times.

It is not too late to test the soil for turfgrass. Use a soil probe and insert it 3 to 4 inches into the soil, remove the probe, dislodge the soil and repeat nine more times. Pull soil from random sites. It is a good idea to pull a different sample for the front and the the back yards. Mix the ten cores of soil, put in containers and take to the local University Extension Office for analysis.

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As we head into this new year, we must realize that water management will be important for all gardeners. We need to think how we can revise or redesign our gardens to conserve water. The elements of the new gardens might include using soaker hoses instead of overhead sprinklers, water barrels to save water from the eaves of our homes and ways to collect water from our heating and air conditioning drainpipes. Whatever we do, we can have pretty, productive gardens with much less water outlay than we have used in the past.

### ORNAMENTALS

Now is the time to plant any new shrubs we have not planted earlier. The weather is cool, there will be less stress on the plants, and they still have time to develop sound root systems before the summer heat returns. Remember, the root ball is the most important part of the plant to water, so consider using soaker hoses or a slow hose at the base of the plant(s). If planting a tree, consider using Gator Bag(s) to direct the water to the root system. They only need filling about once a week.

Now is the time to move large shrubs that have overgrown an area and need more space to mature into large beautiful plants. Before digging, cut long limbs back by one-third to one-half inside the plants. This will result in a smaller leaf and limb area for the roots to support and will greatly increase the chances of survival. When digging these large plants, make sure you take an adequate root ball to keep as many of the smaller roots as possible. One easy way is to dig a trench around the plant then undercut the root ball and have a piece of fabric or burlap to go underneath the ball. Then move the plant to the new location.

Mid-February until early March is the time to do severe pruning. Severe pruning brings a plant back in bounds, rejuvenates it by developing new growth from dormant buds, and opens up a yard again. It might also make you realize that a landscape has been overplanted or that you need a new landscape plan. Remember, boxwoods, junipers and conifers do not like severe pruning.

Prune roses in mid-February to remove dead and diseased canes and to reduce the height of long canes so they will develop strong new growth for flower development. You will also need to spray the plants and ground for disease control and replace the old mulch with new mulch to reduce the presence of disease spores. You can also plant new roses in late February.

Mid-February is a good time to prune lirioppe. The easiest way to do this is by raising the lawn mower to the highest setting and mow over the lirioppe. Some people use a weed eater, but be careful not to cut too close to the ground. About two inches of the base should remain after cutting.

### FLOWERS

Prune back any dead or damaged perennial plants to reinvigorate them. Consider planting any new plants as soon as they are available in garden centers. This way they can develop a large root system before the onset of summer heat.

Remove old foliage from ornamental grasses and irises to make way for new spring growth. Also, remove old leaves and garden debris that accumulated in the perennial beds. As rain compacts this material, it reduces water absorption, allows sunlight to reach the base of the plants to encourage new shoot development, and permits airflow to reach the crowns, so disease does not become a problem.

Fertilize spring-flowering bulbs light-

ly with a 10-10-10 fertilizer at one pound per 100 square feet when the foliage is three to four inches high.

### LAWNS

Mid-February is a good time to apply pre-emergence weed control to home lawns. Products like Atrazine and three-way compounds by Spectracide or Bayer can help control those remaining winter weeds and reduce the emergence of spring weeds that are developing at this time. It also reduces the stress on the turf grass as it breaks dormancy in the next couple of weeks. Remember to follow the label on the products and apply the products over the prescribed area. If you do not want to apply these yourself, use a commercial pest control firm.

Remove any leaves that are remaining on the turf by dropping the blade of your lawn mower one setting to aid in the picking up of the leaves. Keep the blade high enough so you do not scalp the turf and make it more susceptible to cold damage.

### VEGETABLES

Mid-February is the time to plant Irish potatoes, English peas and small onion sets. Start your garden plan for this year and make sure you rotate your plantings to reduce disease problems.

If you have not removed all of your old plants and weeds, do so now to reduce overwintering sites for insect and disease problems. If the ground is not too wet, you might also consider adding some organic matter into the garden to help in nutrient and water retention.

### OTHER

Fertilize and lime pecan trees in mid-February. Apply lime and a pecan special fertilizer at four pounds for every inch in the diameter of the tree. Apply at the drip line of the branches.

It is also time to test your soil if you have not done so already.

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