

December Gardening Tips

By Jeanne Grunert, Seven Oaks

<http://sevenoaks-jeanne.blogspot.com>



I saw a sign in a catalog once that said, "Sshh...The Garden is sleeping." December begins the long, snoozy period when the garden sleeps, first slumbering under gradually thickening frosts, and then finally sleeping deeply under a fluffy blanket of snow. I have a few weeks to finish trimming back the perennials and the asparagus before it's just too cold to work outside.

That doesn't mean, however, that the garden chores are completely finished. We're still tuning up the riding mower and replacing the blades. This is a good time to check your gardening equipment and power tools and noting which needs to be replaced in the spring. Some stores may run clearance sales now on tools or good Christmas sales, and if you've inspected your equipment now, you'll know exactly what you need before you succumb to the "sale" mentality and end up, like I did, with several pairs of hand pruners and no good pruning shears. Making a list, and checking it twice, can help you avoid this situation.

'Tis the start of the catalog season, too. Seed catalogs begin arriving by the end of the month. It's a good idea to let them accumulate for a few weeks so that you have the entire selection available when you plan your garden in January. Seed starting begins in February or so, and by then you will have a good idea of what you'd like to grow. You may want to go online now and request catalogs from specialty growers such as heirloom seed nurseries so that you have the exact ones that you want.

Christmas brings with it certain plants, and if you receive a poinsettia, Christmas cactus, live evergreen or another holiday plant, do take a few minutes to see the Seven Oaks blog or visit your Cooperative Extension office to learn how to care for your new plant.

From all of us at Seven Oaks, Happy Holidays!

December Gardening Tasks

- If you haven't finished pruning back butterfly bushes, perennials and other plants, do so now before the holidays take all your time (and the cold weather makes sitting with a cup of cocoa in front of a warm fire more enticing than working in the garden.)
- Prune roses now. Sterilize pruning equipment by dipping it in rubbing alcohol between cutting back each plant to prevent diseases from transferring from one plant to another.

- Make sure perennials are well-mulched now before it snows. Mulch prevents heaving, which means that when the ground freezes and thaws, it actually pushes plants to the surface. Mulch helps keep the soil temperature consistent, which avoids heaving.
- Take an inventory now of your equipment; what do you need?
- Follow the instructions in your equipment service manuals for proper maintenance and storage before putting away lawn mowers, electric trimmers, edgers, and other power tools.
- Keep bird feeders well stocked, especially as the cooler weather arrives.
- Poinsettia plants are a favorite for the holidays, but they can be tricky to grow. Keep them well watered, near a light source, and avoid drafts. They hate getting cold, even from the short walk from the store to your car.
- If you have a living Christmas tree that you plan to plant outside after the holidays, dig the planting hole now before it snows. Cover the hole with a tarp and mark it with a stake just in case of snows.
- Holiday cooking means lots of scraps. Feed your compost pile with PLANT based scraps only...fruit and vegetable peelings, nut shells, etc. You can rinse egg shells and add crushed egg shells to your compost pile, too, as well as coffee grounds and used tea bags. If there's snow covering your compost pile, just toss the compost on top; when the snow melts, it will simply fall into the pile.



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