

January Gardening Tasks & Tips



January marks the start of a new year, but for gardeners, it's still a time of rest, planning and expectations. In many parts of the United States, the ground is frozen and covered by a blanket of snow. Gardening activities are limited to house plants and planning the spring garden. During a snowy winter, such activities, which can be accomplished next to a crackling, warm fire on a chilly afternoon, are welcome.

If you have Holiday plants such as poinsettia, Christmas cacti and others, make sure you move them from their holiday location to a windowsill that provides them with suitable light. Poinsettia need bright sunlight (southern light), while Christmas cacti thrive in eastern or western light. Take time to learn about the holiday plants in your care, and provide them with what they need to thrive. You may be pleasantly surprised next holiday season when they reward you with beautiful blooms.

This is also a good time of year to take inventory of your gardening tools and supplies, especially seeds. Open seed packets tend to accumulate over the years in my house, and I sometimes mix up the older packages with newer ones. By the end of January, most big box stores and garden centers will stock seed starting equipment and seeds. If you take time now to make your plans and your list for 2014, you'll be ready to shop while the selection is at its best.

Seed catalogs also arrive this month. Sometimes I receive as many as a dozen or more! Ordering from catalogs is fun, and often provides access to rare or unusual plants that are difficult to find locally. This is where your list will come in handy. Your inventory list will provide you with a good starting point so you don't end up ordering 10 packages of tomato seeds and forget the peppers. Use your list to order seeds from catalogs as well as when you are shopping locally.

January Gardening Tips

- Check your house plants now to see if they need repotting. I usually take a Sunday afternoon in January to fuss with my house plants. I like to snip off dead leaves, divide plants that have overgrown their pots, and take cuttings to root.
- Don't forget to dust house plants. Dust accumulates on leaves and can prevent transpiration (plant breathing.) Use a clean, dry cloth and just run it gently over the leaves, especially the leaves of foliage plants.
- Dead-heading spent blooms on flowering house plants such as African violets encourages them to bloom more frequently. Use your fingers and pinch off the old blooms. Throw them out or compost them.



- Clean pots before using them. A weak bleach solution can be used to clean plastic pots. Make sure you rinse it thoroughly before using the pots again. This kills fungus, bacteria and any other nasty things remaining on the pot.
- Who said that saucers for house plants should be boring? I go to garage sales and thrift shops and buy dessert-sized plates from mismatched fancy china sets. These make elegant and beautiful plant saucers, and I don't mind it if they get dirty or break. After all, I've only spent a dime or a quarter on them!
- Take an inventory of your seeds and seed starting supplies now. What do you need? What big items are on your wish list? If you have seed packages stored from prior years, which ones are still viable?
- If you're not sure whether or not seeds are viable, use my seed viability test, or discard them. It's better to spend a dollar or two on new seeds than to plant old ones and be disappointed when they don't grow.
- When seed catalogs arrive in the mail, stack them in a place where you know you can find them later. After you've taken inventory of your seeds and seed starting supplies, make a list of what you want to grow in 2014. Then, order only those seeds that you can't find easily at local garden centers. Seeds for exotic, heirloom or unusual varieties are more easily obtained via mail order; seeds for common plants, at your local garden center.

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