



## February Gardening Tasks & Tips

February is the beginning of the end of winter, a time when there's light at the end of the long, cold, dark tunnel known as winter to the gardener. I don't put much stock in the shadow of a rodent, so the ground hog can see his shadow or not and I still look ahead with optimism to seed starting, tending my house plants, and planning my garden.

February is a time for taking stock of what you have; for ordering seeds, starting seeds; and making sure you're provisions are ready for the first good thaw of spring. It's the time to tend to those house plants and to make sure your holiday plants thrive even though they have almost a year to go before called into service again. It's a short month, but an important month for garden preparations. Make every moment count and think spring!

### February Gardening Tips

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- Create a garden plan. Do you have a garden plan? If not, it's time to create one. You don't need any fancy programs. Take a ruler and a piece of paper, and mark out where your garden beds are, or write them onto a piece of graph paper. Make photo copies and write on them with a pencil so you can daydream on paper.
- Organize garden seeds. It doesn't matter whether you organize them in an old coffee can or a shoebox, but develop a system so you know what you have and where to find it when you are ready.
- Download or create in Excel a calendar to plan your seed starting times and planting times. Visit your Cooperative Extension website and find a list of frost free dates and/or planting dates for your gardening zone. Use that list and a calendar to calculate when to start seeds indoors for planting later.
- Fertilize African violets now for winter bloom. I use a liquid 10-10-10 fertilizer made for violets and available at national garden centers or big box stores. Follow the package directions and do not over-apply fertilizer. It won't make your plants bloom faster, and it may hurt them. Liquid fertilizers used now may encourage blooms.
- Increase the humidity near your house plants. At this time of year, when the indoor heat is cranking away to ward off the chilly February weather, it can also suck all the moisture out of the air which is bad for most (but not all) house plants. Use a spray misting bottle or place a tray of pebbles underneath the pots. Add water. As the water evaporates, it adds humidity to the air.
- Keep watering holiday plants you intend to keep. Poinsettia should be watered and moved to a sunny, warm location away from drafts. Amaryllis will keep



flowering as long as they can. When they drop their blossoms, cut off the blossom stem only and place them in sunny location. Baby the plant. Let it build up its food stores and create next year's flower.

- Feed the birds! Don't forget to put out seed and suet for your feathered friends. On very cold days, a tray of warm water is appreciated by the birds. Try making a bird feeder out of a stale bagel, cut in half and smeared with peanut butter. Press the peanut butter against a tray of loose seeds and tie a string through the middle of the bagel, then hang your new homemade feeder from the nearest tree. Even if you don't attract birds, the squirrels are sure to appreciate it.
- Purchase started bulbs for onions, garlic, and potatoes now. The best selection for these vegetables is in the stores now. They will keep in a cool garage or basement for weeks until you are ready to plant them.
- Collect plastic frosting cans, venetian blinds, and anything else you can cut up for plant labels now. Clean them well, cut into strips, and store until you are ready to use.

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