

Horticulture

Garden Guide

Things to do this month

Brush snow from evergreens as soon as possible after a storm. Use a broom in an upward, sweeping motion. Serious damage may be caused by heavy snow or ice accumulating on the branches.

Avoid heavy traffic on the frozen, dormant lawn. The crown of the plant may be severely damaged or killed.

Use sand instead of salt for icy spots on the sidewalk.

Review your vegetable garden plans. Perhaps a smaller garden with fewer weeds and insects will give you more produce.

When reviewing your garden catalogs for new vegetable varieties to try, an important consideration is improved insect and/or disease resistance.

Analyze last year's planting, fertilizing and spraying records. Make notes to reorder successful varieties as well as those you wish to try again.

Check stored fruits and vegetables such as potatoes and apples for bad spots which may lead to decay. Remove and use those which show signs of spoiling. Separate others into slotted trays or bins to increase air circulation and reduce decay possibilities.

To prolong bloom, protect poinsettias from drafts and keep them moderately moist.

Turn and prune house plants regularly to keep them shapely. Pinch back new growth to promote bushy plants.

Check all houseplants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine they are not harboring any pests.

Houseplants and holiday gift plants should not be placed on top of the television. This location is too warm and in most homes too far from windows to provide adequate light.

During the winter most houses are too dry for houseplants. Humidity may be increased by placing plants on trays lined with pebbles and filled with water to within one-half inch of the base of the pot.

Houseplants with large leaves and smooth foliage, such as philodendrons, dracaena and rubber plant benefit if their leaves are washed at intervals to remove dust and grime, helping keep the leaf pores open.

If you have some time this winter, paint the handles of garden tools red or orange. This will preserve the wood and make the tools easier to locate next summer when you lay them down in the garden or on the lawn.

Move garden ornaments, such as urns or jars, into the garage or basement to prevent damage during the cold winter season. If containers are too large to move, cover them to prevent water collecting in them or turn them upside down during the winter, so water will not collect and freeze in them causing breakage.

Add garden record keeping to the list of New Year's resolutions. Make a note of which varieties of flowers and vegetables do best and which do poorly in your garden.

Feed the birds regularly and see they also have water. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts and bread crumbs as well as bird seed.

Do not wait until late in the winter to order seeds. Many varieties sell out early.

Gardening Resolutions

Before the successes and failures of the last year's growing season fade from memory or get pushed aside by the anticipation of another gardening year, why not take a moment to convert lessons learned and good intentions into resolutions for the coming year.

I resolve to:

- make a list of needed plants and seeds before I start browsing through the seed catalogs.
- limit the size of vegetable and flower gardens to what I can care for properly.
- plan my vegetable garden carefully and follow the plan closely so I can rotate crops and make good use of all

available space.

- plant cool season crops early and again in mid- to late-summer for a fall harvest.
- harvest crops at their peak of quality and maturity. No more giant zucchini or tough beans.
- freeze or can produce as soon as possible after harvest to maintain high quality.
- check plants regularly for insect problems and do a better job of controlling them.
- if available, try biological or cultural controls first, rather than chemicals to control pest problems.
- mulch earlier to control weeds.
- persist in weed control efforts all summer to prevent weeds from going to seed and adding to next year's problems.

- put tomato cages in place at planting time.
- plant hardy trees, shrubs, perennials and other landscape plants according to a landscape plan, selecting less problem prone plants whenever possible to minimize the need for chemical sprays, pruning and other maintenance.
- place landscape prunings, grass clippings and other organic material in a compost pile.
- set up a priority system for lawn and garden resolutions so gardening and landscape maintenance continue to be a pleasant experience rather than an overwhelming list of chores. (MJF)

Humidity and Plants in the Home Environment

Dry air in your home not only makes you feel uncomfortable, but it also harms your plant's growth. Moisture in the air is measured in terms of relative humidity. Most houseplants grow best at 40 to 60 percent humidity, but can tolerate levels as low as 20 percent. Unfortunately, home heating systems take moisture out of the air and houses commonly have lower than a 20 percent humidity level in winter.

How do you tell if your plants need more humidity? Look for these danger signs: brown and shriveled leaf tips, dried up flower buds and blooms and yellowed leaf edges. Entire leaves may turn yellow, wilt and fall off the plant. Many flowering houseplants are sensitive to low humidity levels, including African violet, azalea, cyclamen, impatiens, bromeliads and dwarf citrus trees.

The foliage plants which prefer a more humid environment include the thinner leaved plants such as ferns, philodendron and spider plant. Cacti and succulents are native to deserts and they can tolerate low humidity levels.

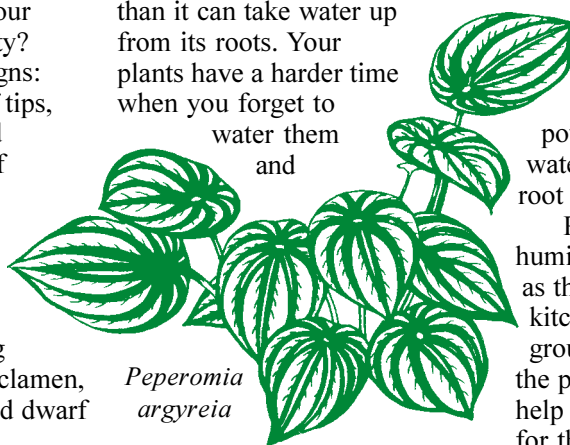
You can minimize the damaging effects of low humidity to your plants by following proper watering practices. Plant tissue dries out because the plant loses water from its leaves faster than it can take water up from its roots. Your plants have a harder time when you forget to water them and

the soil dries out. Water plants before the soil dries out completely.

You may also need to increase the humidity around your plants. The easiest way is with a humidifier, which can increase humidity levels by 20 to 30 percent. Use portable units or humidifiers installed as part of your home's heating system.

Another option is to grow plants in a waterproof tray with an inch of pebbles, crushed rock, sand or perlite. Water up to, but not above, the level of stony material. Make sure the pots themselves do not sit in water or the plants risk getting root rot.

Put your plants where humidity levels are highest, such as the bathroom or above the kitchen sink. You might want to group many plants together. As the plants give off moisture, they help create a moist environment for the whole group. (MJF)



Peperomia argyreia

Horticulture Information Center

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24 hours a day, 7 days a week
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441-7188 in the Lincoln area

To listen to a NUFACTS information center message, call the number above on a touch-tone phone, then enter a three-digit number listed below. Call 441-7180 to receive a brochure with all the NUFACTS message topics.

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What Do Birds Like to Eat?

Are there certain birds you would like to attract to your landscape? You can do this by providing the foods they prefer to eat.

Cardinal: autumn-olive, dogwood, corn, sunflower, various berries

Blue jay: acorns, cherry, sunflower, wild plum, cultivated grains

Robin: cherry, cotoneaster, Russian-olive, mulberry, grapes, dogwood, sumac, hackberry, various berries

Black-capped chickadee: sunflower, conifer tree seeds, black-berry, various berries

American goldfinch: goldenrod, sunflower, mulberry, thistle seed, annual flower seeds

Junco: millet, wheat, sunflower, grass seed

