



## Garden Guide

### Things to do this month

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

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.

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. Watch also for drought-tolerant types.

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 house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine that they are not harboring any pests.

House plants 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 house plants. 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.

House plants 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 that they 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. (MJF)

## Caring for Florist Azaleas

Florist azaleas are not hardy in southeastern Nebraska and should not be planted outdoors for survival. However, they can be cared for as a regular blooming houseplant.

Make sure the soil does not dry out and the plant does not wilt. Many azalea soil mixes are composed of a high percentage of peat moss which dries quickly, especially when the plant is in full bloom. It may be necessary to water daily. Submerging the pot and allowing the peat-like soil to absorb water and then draining in the sink, may be beneficial.

Once the petals have fallen, keep the plant in a cool, sunny location. Plants may be set outdoors in partial shade for the summer. Fertilize monthly with a houseplant fertilizer. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Keep the plant outdoors as long as possible in the fall, but bring indoors before a heavy frost.



Photo: J.S. Peterson at USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

In order for the plants to receive full sun during this bloom, it is necessary to go through a cool, dormant period. Temperatures between 40 to 50° F are ideal. Warmer temperatures will probably limit flower bud formation. Plants should

receive full sun during this period. Continue to water but limit fertilizer. When flower buds start forming, move the plant to a warmer location and increase humidity. (MJF)

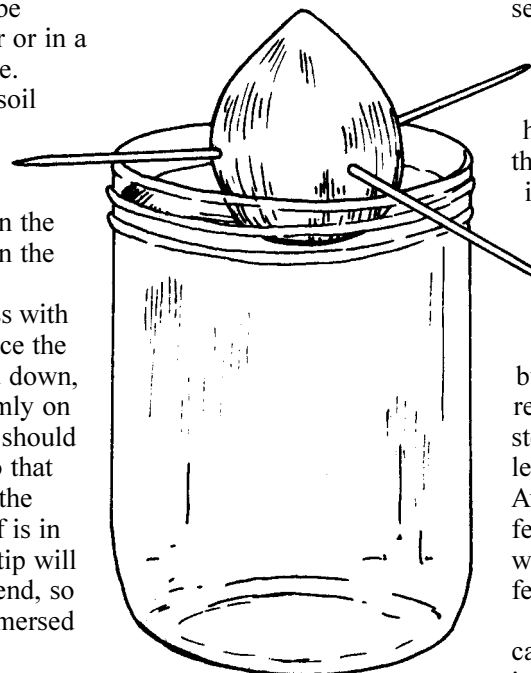
## Starting Avocado Seeds

Avocado seeds may be started in a glass of water or in a moist, porous soil mixture. Either will work, but the soil method will provide faster results. If the seed is started in water, insert three or four toothpicks in the seed about half way down the sides.

Next, fill a small glass with water to the brim and place the seed in the glass, flat end down, so the toothpicks rest firmly on the brim. The toothpicks should be supporting the seed so that the pointed half is out of the water and the bottom half is in the water. The sprouting tip will come out of the pointed end, so be sure the flat end is immersed in water.

Place the glass on a sunny window sill or some other well lighted spot. Add water as needed to keep the bottom half of the seed wet at all times.

After many weeks, a small root should appear from the flat



seed in a container with house plant potting soil. If the avocado seed is started in soil, fill a large container with house plant potting soil. Plant the seed so that the pointed end is just under the soil surface. Keep the soil moist until the avocado plant is established.

Water the plant often enough to keep the soil moist but not wet. A wet soil will result in curled leaves and soft stems. A dry soil will cause dry leaves that eventually fall off. Avocado plants should be fertilized every three months with a standard houseplant fertilizer.

Also, remember that avocado plants require good, indirect light. Because avocado plants grow into trees, provide them with plenty of growing space. Avocados are not hardy in Nebraska and will not survive the winter outside. (MJF)

end, and there should be signs of a small shoot at the pointed end. Tiny leaves will develop and grow on this shoot. Later, when the main stem emerges, plant the

## Horticulture Information Center

NUFACTS  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
1-800-832-5441; or  
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.

### NUFACTS

- 117 Tree Snow Damage
- 124 Wood for Fireplace
- 137 De-icing Salt Injury
- 210 Amaryllis
- 212 Swedish Ivy
- 213 Prayer Plant
- 214 Houseplant Insects
- 215 Cyclamens
- 217 Boston Fern
- 218 African Violet Care
- 220 Houseplant Leaf Yellowing
- 222 Winter Houseplant Care
- 223 Repotting Houseplants
- 224 Houseplant Artificial Light

## Growing Norfolk Island Pines

The Norfolk Island pine is an evergreen plant suitable for a houseplant. It can be used in a variety of decorative purposes. In its native habitat, it can grow to a height of 220 feet with a trunk up to 10 feet in diameter. As a small plant, it is very uniform with branches parallel to the ground. These branches have rows of soft, bright green, half-inch long needles that taper to a fine point.

The Norfolk Island pine is a long lasting houseplant that grows 3 to 6 inches a year. A large Norfolk Island pine makes an excellent display in entrance halls or foyers and presents a good first impression of the home or office. Smaller plants are handsome attractions for coffee tables, desks and end tables. Norfolk Island pines grow well in indirect sunlight.

Night temperatures of 50 to 55° F and day temperatures of 68 to 72° F are optimal for plant growth. However, the Norfolk Island pine will tolerate temperatures between 45 and 85° F.

The soil should be kept only lightly moistened. This plant does not require as much water as most common houseplants. It cannot tolerate soggy or saturated soil. Norfolk Island pines do not require frequent fertilization. Use any complete houseplant fertilizer and follow the label recommendations.

These pines need to be repotted every three to four years to allow for growth. (MJF)

