



Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service • West Lafayette, IN

Winter Garden Calendar

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Timing horticultural events and practices can vary from year to year, depending on weather conditions. The following information is intended as a general guide. Regional differences are noted when practical. Adjust activities according to local weather and site conditions. Be sure to read label directions thoroughly on all products.

Indoor Plants and Activities

December

- Check houseplant leaves for brown, dry edges that may indicate too little relative humidity in the house. Increase humidity by running a humidifier, grouping plants, or using pebble trays.
- Extend the beauty of holiday plants, such as poinsettias and Christmas cactus, by placing them in a cool, brightly lit area free from warm or cold drafts.
- Houseplants may not receive adequate light because days are short and gloomy. Move plants closer to windows, but avoid placing foliage against cold glass panes. Artificial lighting may be helpful.
- Because growth slows or stops in winter months, most plants will require less water and little, if any, fertilizer.
- If you are forcing bulbs for the holidays, bring them into warmer temperatures after they have been sufficiently precooled. Two to four weeks of warm temperatures (60°F), bright light, and moderately moist soil are needed to bring on flowers. Bulbs require a chilling period of about 10 to 12 weeks at 40°F to initiate flower buds and establish root growth. Precooled bulbs are available from many garden suppliers if you did not get yours cooled in time.

- When shopping for a Christmas tree, check for green, flexible, firmly held needles and a sticky trunk base, both indicators of freshness. Make a fresh cut, and keep the cut end under water at all times.
- Evergreens, except pines and spruce, can be trimmed now for a fresh supply of holiday greenery. Use proper pruning techniques to preserve the beauty of landscape plants.

January

- Keep holiday poinsettias and other plants near a bright window. Water as top of soil becomes dry.
- Check produce and tender bulbs kept in storage, and discard any that show signs of decay, such as mold or softening. Shriveling indicates insufficient relative humidity.

February

- Check water levels daily in cut-flower vases.
- Repot houseplants as they outgrow current pots.
- Early blooms of spring-flowering bulbs can make good gifts for a sweetheart. Keep the plant in a bright, cool location for longer lasting blooms. Forced bulbs make poor garden flowers and should be discarded as blooms fade.

Lawns, Woody Ornamentals Landscape Plants, and Tree Fruits

December

- Prevent bark-splitting of young and thin-barked trees, such as fruit and maple trees. Wrap trunks with tree wrap, or paint trunks with white latex (not oil-based) paint, particularly on the south- and southwest-facing sides.

- Protect shrubs, such as junipers and arborvitae, from extensive snow loads by tying their stems together with twine. Carefully remove heavy snow loads with a broom to prevent limb breakage.
- Protect broadleaved evergreens, or other tender landscape plants from excessive drying by winter sun and wind. Place canvas, burlap, or polyethylene plastic screens to the south and west to protect the plants. Similarly, shield plants from street and sidewalk salt spray.
- Provide winter protection for roses by mounding soil approximately 12 inches high to insulate the graft union. Additional organic mulch, such as straw, compost, or chopped leaves, can be placed on top. Wait until late winter or early spring to prune.

January

- Check young trees for rodent injury on lower trunks. Prevent injury with hardware cloth or protective collars.
- "Leaf" through nursery catalogs and make plans for landscape and home orchard additions. Order plants early for best selection.
- Cut branches of forsythia, pussy willow, crabapple, quince, honeysuckle, and other early spring-flowering plants to force into bloom indoors. Place the branches in warm water, and set them in a cool location.

February

- Check mulches, rodent shields, salt/wind screens, and other winter plant protections to make sure they are still in place.
- Prune landscape plants, except early spring bloomers, which should be pruned after flowers fade. Birches, maples, dogwoods, and other heavy sap bleeders can be pruned in early summer to avoid the sap flow, although bleeding is not harmful to the tree.
- Prune fruit trees to control plant size and remove dead, damaged, or weak limbs.

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

Flowers, Vegetables, and Small Fruits

December

- Protect newly planted or tender perennials by applying mulch such as straw, chopped leaves, or other organic material after plants become dormant.
- Store leftover garden chemicals where they will stay dry, unfrozen, and out of the reach of children, pets, and unsuspecting adults.
- Mulch strawberries when temperatures have dropped to 20°F.
- Clean up dead plant materials, synthetic mulch, and other debris in the vegetable garden as well as in the flower beds, rose beds, and orchards.
- Order seed catalogs, and make notes for next year's garden.

January

- Browse through garden catalogs and order seeds and plants early for best selection.
- Sketch your garden plans on paper, including what to grow, spacing, arrangement, and number of plants needed.
- Wood ashes from the fireplace can be spread in the garden, but don't overdo it. Wood ashes increase soil pH, and excess application can make some nutrients unavailable for plant uptake. Have your soil tested to be certain of the pH before adding wood ash.

February

- Prepare or repair lawn and garden tools for the upcoming season.
- Start seeds indoors for cool-season vegetables so they will be ready for transplanting to the garden early in the season. Broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage seeds should be started five to seven weeks prior to transplanting.
- Test leftover garden seed for germination. Place 10 seeds between moist paper toweling or cover with a thin layer of soil. Keep seeds warm and moist. If less than six seeds germinate, then fresh seed should be purchased.