

News Article

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December Lawn and Garden Activities

The following lawn, landscape and garden suggestions for the month of December are from “Winter Garden Calendar,” Purdue Extension publication HO-90, authored by B. Rosie Lerner. Timing horticultural events and practices can vary from year to year, depending on weather conditions. The following information is intended as a general guide. Adjust activities according to local weather and site conditions, and be sure to read and follow label directions thoroughly on all products.

Indoor Plants and Activities

- 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.

Lawns, Woody Ornamental Landscape Plants and Tree Fruits

- 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.

Flowers, Vegetables, and Small fruits

- 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.