

Gardening tips for January

Trees and shrubs

- ☞ Cranberrybush viburnum provides year-round color. Its fruits are very tart in fall and the birds will not eat them until the fruits mellow over winter. This is a good thing since it keeps red color in our landscape all winter plus it provides a source of food for birds in early spring when natural food sources are at a premium.
- ☞ Heavy loads of snow can damage shrubs and young trees. Gently broom off the snow, using an upward motion.
- ☞ Trees and shrubs have an economic value. If damaged by ice or accident, they are sometimes covered by homeowner's insurance.
- ☞ Sap can bleed profusely out of the pruning wounds of maples and birches. Don't worry—this bleeding is completely harmless. We do not recommend putting wound dressings on these trees. They heal better without the dressing, as dressings can sometimes trap moisture in the wound, creating rot.
- ☞ Now is a good time to prune tree branches that cast shade over flower beds. Pruning is more difficult in spring and summer when the flowers are growing.



Vegetables

- ☞ It's time to plan for this summer's vegetable garden. Focus on varieties that are early maturing, high yielding, disease-resistant and heat-tolerant.

Fruits

- ☞ If you are buying a fruit tree, there are lots of good nurseries that serve the nation. St. Lawrence Nurseries is unique in that it specializes in selling varieties for the far north, including Zone 3. Its selection of apple varieties for the north is especially impressive.
- ☞ Black knotty growths on plum and cherry trees should be removed during winter. Prune 8–12 inches below where you see the fungus to make sure you remove all of it (including the fungus within the branch). Remove this diseased tissue from the area since it is infectious.

Flowers and houseplants

- ☞ A tip from the Marcy Pflieger, President of the Prairie Rose Club, led me to Chamblee's Rose Nursery as an economical source of roses. Their potted roses might be a little small when delivered in spring, but the bushes are healthy and establish easily. Chamblee's offers many hardy and semi-hardy roses that grow on their own roots (instead of being grafted onto a wild rose). This is a nice feature because if the branches die to the ground from a cold winter, the bushes will resprout and remain true to form.
- ☞ Check flower bulbs that you have in storage. Toss out any soft, rotted bulbs. Cool temperatures (40–50 degrees) will reduce the likelihood of bulbs prematurely sprouting.
- ☞ Most houseplants do not actively grow in January. We typically do not fertilize houseplants this time of year.


- ☞ Little gnats sometimes fly around your houseplants in winter. These are fungus gnats, which prefer a humid environment. Let your plants dry a bit between waterings and these gnats will be less of a nuisance.
- ☞ Be careful about watering cacti and other succulent houseplants this time of year. They do not actively grow now and don't need much water. Water them only if you begin to see them shrivel a bit from dryness.
- ☞ Amaryllis is a popular holiday flower. If your plant is done blooming, you need to refill the bulb with energy so it can bloom next year. Cut off the flower stalk. Fertilize the leafy plant with a balanced, soluble fertilizer. Move the plant near a sunny window and keep it growing through the summer.
- ☞ If your African violet has stopped blooming, it likely needs a bit more light. Move it closer to a bright window that does not get harsh afternoon sun.
- ☞ Tall, spindly hibiscus plants can be pruned back to develop a bushier plant. Cut back to side shoots located down the branch. New shoots will develop wherever you make the pruning cuts. A spindly plant can be trimmed back to only six inches tall, and it will regenerate itself. A three to four foot high hibiscus is generally ideal.
- ☞ The vines of sweet potatoes make for an interesting houseplant. Start your plant by placing a sweet potato in a container of water, leaving the top 1/3 exposed to air. Transplant the potato when a strong root system develops.
- ☞ Cyclamen is an attractive plant to give to someone you love. Its colorful flowers look like butterflies, or perhaps shooting stars on a summer night.
- ☞ Cut flowers in a vase will also last longer if they are placed out of direct sunlight and in a cool spot.

- ☞ Indoor humidity and light will affect the need for watering houseplants. Low levels of humidity and high levels of light will increase the need for watering.

Lawns

- ☞ Kentucky bluegrass is not damaged by heavy snowmobile traffic (80 passes), as long as there is an inch of snow over the turf. Serious damage is caused after warm spells when the snow becomes slushy or when snowmobiles go over bare grass patches.

Wildlife

- ☞ Songbirds fill the winter landscape with entertaining sounds, bright flashes of color, and curious movements that are enjoyable to watch. Keep your bird feeder clean to prevent disease problems. Regularly remove moldy seed and fecal droppings. Feeders may be disinfected by dunking them in a 10% household bleach solution; let the feeder dry before refilling with fresh seed. Remove accumulations of spilled seeds and seed coats from the ground. 

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