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## *Your Indoor Outdoor guide to gardening* **JANUARY**

### **ORNAMENTAL GARDEN DESIGN**

The selection of a landscape designer is one of the many decisions for a new homeowner. An easy choice is to pick a local landscaper, someone who is familiar with the planting zone, and knows which plants do well in the area.

The alternative is to do the project yourself, an intimidating prospect, but with some planning and research, you can do the job.

In general, most planning begins with a division of the various areas surrounding your home into their functional use. Of most importance is probably the ENTRANCE, framing your home, offering curb appeal and welcoming visitors with a first look at your home.

The SERVICE AREA is just that; it's required to take care of the trash and store bulk items that you would choose not to have showing from the road. When placing this area, keep in mind that convenience should play a large part in the choice of location.

The PRIVATE OR RECREATION AREAS are often "back of the house" entertainment areas where you can sunbathe or party.

Other optional areas you may want to consider in your planning are: GARDENS, for vegetables, flowers, and cut flowers; and WATER FEATURES, including ponds, water falls, fountains, or bird baths. For larger properties you may want to consider adding pools, tennis courts, or other RECREATIONAL AMENITIES.

Once you have divided your property into what you believe to be the ideal for the above divisions, begin a survey of the property's natural features. Perhaps an outcropping of rock can be a focal point for a garden design.

Identify existing trees and if possible preserve them. Keep in mind that southern and western exposures are ideal for deciduous trees if you want shade for cooling in the summertime and sunlight in the winter. Recognized changes in elevations, hills and hummocks, flat areas which can be used for lawns, or natural drainage areas. Planning for the coming years will help resolve most of the problems before you begin.

Identify your home's growing zone and purchase only those plants that will survive. If you choose to become involved in landscaping your property, visit your public library; as gardening is one of the most popular pastimes in the U.S., libraries are well stocked with many books on design, plants and "how to" books.

By Ed Cron, Penn State Master Gardener

### **BEAUTIFUL THIS MONTH**

- ❖ Groundcover: Gaultheria (wintergreen).
- ❖ Shrubs: Cotoneaster, Ilex (holly), Leucothoe, Lindera (spicebush), Mahonia, Pieris, Taxus (yew).

### **SEASONAL**

- ❖ A live tree, balled and burlapped, used as a Christmas tree will need to be gradually moved outdoors. Before you plant, remove the string at the top of the root ball and carefully pull back the upper section. You should remove all plastic coverings and the upper part of the burlap after placing in the planting hole. Mulch and water immediately after planting.
- ❖ Poinsettias that have finished blooming can be cut back.
- ❖ If you have been using salt to melt ice on walks and drives near trees and shrubs, consider using sand or sawdust at those locations instead. Salt damage on needled evergreens will show as copper and yellow tints to foliage by spring. Deciduous plants will develop bronze or reddish leaves in the spring from salt damage.
- ❖ You can enjoy an early spring indoors by forcing branches or spring-flowering trees and shrubs – forsythia, crabapple, and dogwood are among those which can be forced by placing cut (18-24") branches in water in a warm location.

## **PLANNING FOR YOUR GARDEN**

- ❖ If you are new to gardening, or would like to start, recruit friends to support you in your first efforts. Their encouragement will help you with your first seeds and seedlings. Start with easy to grow plants and work up to more difficult ones.
- ❖ This is a good time to get spring gardening ideas from winter flower shows. Look over your gardening books and magazines.
- ❖ Order from your seed and plant catalogs, many will be delivered shortly after the holidays. Choose old favorites, but consider some the Gardeners Select plants or All-American Selections. When you are selecting plants, try to choose disease and insect resistant varieties. They will make gardening easier, reduce costs and reduce environmental pollution.
- ❖ Evaluate your garden work area and make any needed adjustments. Maybe add a potting bench or shed.
- ❖ Consider adding more plants with winter interest: evergreens, plants with attractive branching or bark, to your landscape in the spring.
- ❖ Evaluate your landscape for energy efficiency. Plant evergreens toward the north to reduce winter winds, add deciduous plants to the west to provide shade in summer and allow solar heating in the winter, etc.

## **HOUSEPLANTS**

- ❖ Carefully monitor your indoor humidity levels. Mist (using distilled water) and water plants (tap water is okay) regularly. When your plants have a good level of humidity, you will also be healthier and more comfortable.
- ❖ Low light in mid-winter may cause your houseplants to become leggy. Provide supplemental light and rotate pots to distribute light better. When adding light, consider that fluorescent bulbs can be as close as four inches from leaves, while incandescent bulbs need to be at least three feet away to avoid burning leaves. Wipe dust from plants using a cloth moistened with clear water to improve light reception by the plant.
- ❖ If there are significant drafts from windows near plants, close shades or drapes between the plants and the windows on very cold nights.
- ❖ Keep checking plants closely for insect infestations and treat as needed.

## **BULBS**

- ❖ This is still a good time to force pre-cooled bulbs of hyacinths, narcissus and tulips.
- ❖ Check summer bulbs in storage regularly for rot or decay; discard those affected.

## **COMPOST**

- ❖ Continue to save coffee grounds and kitchen waste (fruit and vegetable peelings) for the compost pile.
- ❖ Start a worm compost bin.

## **VEGETABLE GARDENS**

- ❖ Towards the end of the month you can look for some mulched areas in the vegetable garden where the soil is not frozen. Sowing spinach, radish, peas and lettuce and covering with an inch of mulch can provide a very early spring crop.

## **SMALL FRUITS**

- ❖ If not already mulched, it's best to mulch these before the first heavy snow to prevent winter injury.
- ❖ Remove dead or infested wood and mummified fruit from grapes and blueberries.

- ❖ Plants improperly fertilized: deficient in zinc or phosphorus or excessive in nitrogen or potassium are more susceptible to winter damage. Remember to take soil tests for small fruits in the spring.

### **TREE FRUITS**

- ❖ Continue to pick up and discard any fallen fruits.
- ❖ Control mice by pulling mulch away from the trunks of fruit trees about 3-4" all around. Set traps if needed.

### **HERBS**

- ❖ Start planning for next year's holiday gifts and decorations. Record the flowers and herbs that you would have liked to use this past year and plant them for this year's harvest.

### **LAWNS**

- ❖ If your lawn is frozen, avoid walking in the same paths throughout the winter.

### **PERENNIALS, BIENNIALS & ANNUALS**

- ❖ If you are using a cold frame, be sure to ventilate the inside on sunny days. Prop up the cover long enough to keep the plants dormant.
- ❖ Gerbera seed planted now can bloom this June. They can be repotted this fall and grown indoors over winter.

### **TREES & SHRUBS**

- ❖ When snows are very heavy, knock off accumulated snow from evergreens and other woody plants. Brush upwards to reduce damage. Prop up ice-covered branches until they thaw.
- ❖ Arborvitae and other columnar evergreens can be protected from splitting in heavy snows by wrapping the plant with rope to pull branches together.
- ❖ Branches from Christmas trees can be used to provide winter protection for low evergreens and evergreen perennials.
- ❖ Press snow down near your trees to discourage mice from nesting and chewing on the bark and roots. If mouse damage is observed, use baits hardware cloth or protective collars, rodent control and traps.
- ❖ Reapply mulches that have blown away in winter wind.

### **ROSES**

- ❖ If you have not covered your roses yet, they can still benefit from applying it now. Water the plants prior to mulching.

### **WATER GARDENS**

- ❖ Keep debris off frozen ponds.