

JANUARY TO DO LIST

- Please note, most of the information shared here was obtained from Research-based sources (see contributors acknowledgements below), and from individuals who are considered very knowledgeable on a particular subject. While some little tidbits here may be of interest, they should be taken "with-a-grain-of-salt".

(compiled by MG Brian D. Townsend)

*In the soft, warm bosom of a decaying compost heap,
A transformation of life to death and back and again is taking place. –
J.I. Rodale, Founder of Organic Gardening magazine*

1st WEEK:

Protect tender plants with covers or mulch when freezes are forecast. Remember that plastic and/or cloth over a plant or a greenhouse will heat up if the sun appears. Be prepared to open it up for ventilation. (* Plastic directly against leaves in a freeze can actually conduct heat away and freeze-burn the leaves. - *me*)

Cut off the frozen tops of lantanas, firebush, poinciana, esperanza and other root-hardy plants and perennials at any time. If the brown foliage and stems don't bother you, leave them as cover, until early spring, for the base of the plant and for birds as foliage for shelter and to search out food.

Do not be too quick to toss plants that appear to be frost-damaged. If the cold was not severe, the stems might not be damaged.

Pruning of all trees (including fruit trees) and bushes can begin now. Dress pruning wounds on oaks immediately (paint cuts with latex paint, not pruning paint - *LR*). Prune back all shrub branches within one foot of the house. Texas Cooperative Extension publications explain proper pruning techniques. Call (210) 467-6575.

Suet is a high-energy food for insect-eating birds and is beneficial during the winter months when other food sources are low. Put it in wire cages made for the purpose (allow some time for the birds to find it as the suet is not a naturally recognizable foodsource).

This also a good time to relocate small trees and shrubs, remembering to remove at least half of the top growth to compensate for root loss. Still a good time to plant new trees and shrubs to allow roots to develop before hot weather arrives.

Midwinter is a good time to plant fruit trees and pecans. If you are in heavy clay soil, use an 8' x 8' raised bed for fruit trees. If you have enough room for a pecan, consider the Pawnee variety. It matures early, has aphid resistance and makes an attractive tree.

Rye seed will germinate in winter and provide some erosion control. Do not waste your time with Bermuda seed; it only germinates when soil is warmer (after mid-April).

Primulas are options for containers or sheltered beds in the shade during winter. - *CF*

Enjoy blooming alyssum, dianthus and pansies.

Plant tulip, daffodil and hyacinth bulbs no later than the first part of this month. Plant Anemone and ranunculus bulbs late in this month. - *NS*

For terrific tulips guaranteed, you need to think "heads up"! Learn how to tell the nose of a tulip bulb from its toes. Then, plant it nose up. If you plant it upside down, the plant will waste a lot of energy better spent on flower production. - *JB*

Take advantage of bad weather (or holiday, any reason will do!) to study Texas A&M's Plant Answers Web site at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>.

Finish planting spring flowering narcissus bulbs.

Plant cutback perennial areas in the flowerbed with pansies, violas, larkspur or bluebonnets.

- *EO*

Use a water-soluble, complete-and-balanced analysis fertilizer such as 20-20-20 to new annual flower transplants for quickest start.

Use (same as above) 20-20-20 fertilizer monthly in diluted (at least half strength) form to houseplants during dark days of mid-winter.

Watch houseplants for signs of **mealy bugs, spider mites, scale** and other pests. Use tender houseplant spray as needed.

Use dormant ("horticultural") oil to eliminate **scale** insects on hollies, camellias, euonymus, photinias, oaks, and pecans, fruit trees during winter. Read and follow label directions as they pertain to temperature and rainfall. - *NS*

Be sure outdoor plants are well-watered. Cold weather can damage plants that are too dry. Prune summer-flowering shrubs and vines such as crape myrtle, althea and trumpet vine.

Get cold frames ready for vegetable seedlings and flowering transplants. - *LR*

The Ethics of Backyard Birdfeeding: I. Act in ways that do not endanger the welfare of birds or other wildlife. II. Act in ways that do not harm the natural environment. III.

Always respect the rights of others. IV. Groups should assume special responsibilities. * As part of a larger group of bird aficionados who pro-actively feed birds in our yards, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to teach nonbirders by our actions that feeding the birds is an enjoyable and beneficial experience. It enhances our enjoyment of the outdoors, it connects us with nature in a positive way, and it gives us the opportunity to create in our children and in others a sense of caring and responsibility for nature and the environment that will serve us all well in the years to come. - *WBC*

Gather wood chips and wood mulch to put in woodpecker house (This lets them think they're cleaning/preparing their own "house" nest). - *me*

In Our Rose Garden: If El Nino does finally raise its ugly self in our area, there can be periods of wet and mild weather which can bring about perfect conditions for **downey mildew**, something that we don't want in our gardens. Here's what to look for. 1.) Ideal Temperatures- Spores will germinate and become active with temps. between 50 and 75 degrees and relative humidity above 85%, especially during periods of wet and rainy weather. 2.) Visual Description- At first, purple splotches will appear on the foliage and canes, then will turn a camouflage pattern of brown, yellow and green. Then the foliage will fall off (and this dropped foliage should be cleaned up because the spores can be reactivated if the right conditions occur). 3.) Preventive Measures- to help prevent downey mildew in the garden, make Additional Winter Chores-

a.) Continue to provide some moisture for your roses (water beds deeply if no rain for 10 days), especially newly planted ones. Remember, container roses need to be checked more frequently.

b.) Check for **spider mites**, especially on miniatures. If you do find mites, treat with either a water-washing every third day for nine days or spray with *Green Light Red Spider Mite* spray (2 tsp. per gal. of spray).

c.) This is an ideal month to continue to transplant your roses. (* Refer to DEC2DO list for instructions. Also check your "How To Grow Roses" booklet (pg. 5-7) for additional information.)

d.) Make sure all new rose beds have been completed so the soil will have time for settling.

(*Water them to hasten settling. Don't depend on Mother Nature!)

e.) Check winter dressing of compost or manure and keep at least a 2" depth on the beds into Feb. Also, you might consider kelp, fishmeal, blood meal, alfalfa, or other organics that take time for the microbes to make their goodies available. Some rosarian's use soil conditioners about this time of year. Nitron A-35, Medina, or even gypsum are used just before or sometime after the organics are added.

f.) Make sure your pruners have been cleaned, oiled and sharpened for the upcoming bush pruning in later February. Using a file or whetstone will provide you with a sharp, smooth cutting edge. Remember, dull pruners can damage the bark and cambium layers of rose canes leaving them open to fungi, which can cause dieback.

g.) now would be a good time to flush out your sprayer to remove the alkaline residue buildup. We use a mixture of half distilled vinegar and water and run it through the sprayer. Does a great job.

h.) Since we all handle mixtures, compost, manures, etc., it would be a good time to check with your doctor to see when you had your last tetanus booster shot. It's recommended at least every ten years, but some rose people feel a shorter shot cycle of five years is safer. Get your doctor's opinion, and get it updated if it's needed.

i.) Start making an inventory of spring rose supplies that you will need including spray materials, feeds (soluble or granular), iron supplements (*Sprint 330*, *Ironite*), organics, etc.

j.) If you water your roses using the Dramm system (or any system using nozzles), now would be a good time to remove each nozzle and remove the pin from the nozzle and soak them both in a solution like *Lime Away* for a few minutes. This will remove any alkaline buildup on the emitters and pins. Wash with clean water and fasten them back into the system.

A YEAR IN THE ROSE GARDEN: by A.J."Pop" Warner

a) Sharpen and oil shears; maybe get a new pruning saw.

b) Finish moving bushes that need moving. Don't prune yet, but tie the canes together so you can handle the bushes and dig them without getting all scratched up.

c) Finish the bed you should have completed last October.

d) Keep the **chickweed** (and other junk!) pulled out of established beds. It grows and seeds like crazy in cool weather and seeds now are future weeds multiplied to the nth power. Chickweed is edible; it is a shame it is not palatable.

e) Add to your mulch. A good mulch will keep the soil cool during the winter warm spells and tend to prevent damaging premature growth.

f) Order new labels. You know the names of your roses but your visitors do not.

g) Throw away tag-ends of pesticides that you think may no longer be effective. They will not be any better in the spring.

In Our Herb Garden: Plan spring herb garden, consider location, space, size, shape, sun, and plant groupings. * Plan companion planting. * Review seed catalogs and visit with herb growers as to new varieties and then order seeds. * Keep in mind as you read and plan that many herb books, and even seed packets, are written for growing conditions other than ours (we are zone 8b, and we even have our own microclimates). * Start seeds of perennials and later annuals in a cold frame or greenhouse. * Temperature extremes (abnormally high day/night, then a hard freeze blow in) during winter months may cause new growth for perennials and resultant freezing. Mulch should help protect plants. Wait until the ground warms to remove frost victims. * Spruce up the garden. Remove fall debris (and compost it). - *HERBS: A Resource Guide for San Antonio*

Start taking Christmas lights and stuff down **real soon**, or just wait until July 4th! Also you may want to set aside items you haven't used in two years or more and either donate them to charity or tag them for a spring garage sale. - *me*

2nd WEEK:

It is time to think about birdhouses for your yard. Some birds begin breeding in February.

Water your St. Augustine grass lawn deeply if temperatures of 24 degrees are forecast.

Have **soil tested for pH** level in lawn and raised beds. Add acidifying iron supplements to acid-loving plants and replenish their pine bark or pine needle mulch.

If the weather has been favorable, this is a good time to fertilize "Texas Gold" columbines, irises, paperwhites and other perennials putting on growth for early spring blooms. Use organic fertilizer (1/2 cup) or slow-release lawn fertilizer (1/4 cup) per plant.

Spray **dormant oil** on roses, fruit trees and pecans when we have 2 consecutive days of temperatures over 45 deg. The oil is an effective control for scale, phylloxera and other wintering insects. (See earlier note from *NS*.)

Plant tulips now for early spring blooms.

Acorns or pecans collected now can be planted immediately in containers. Avoid nuts with holes. Small oak and pecan trees will emerge in spring.

It is time to replant sweet peas and English peas if the cold weather destroyed the seedlings. Deer also love the seedlings.

It is time to place (repair/ replace) all of your birdhouses. Titmice, chickadees, wrens, woodpeckers, owl and martins will be looking for nesting boxes very soon.

January is "10 % Tuesdays" month at independently owned nurseries. Ten percent of gross sales on Tuesdays this month will be donated to youth gardening programs in Bexar County.

Order seeds for spring vegetable and flower gardens. - *CF*

Prepare garden beds for spring planting by working in organic matter.

Celebrate the New Year by planting a tree, or maybe "sponsoring" one! Stop by and visit that tree to see if it is doing better than your resolutions!

Improve your landscape for this year by learning from gardening books that focus on this region (and there are a few somewhere!) - *EO*

Prune, or clean out perennials killed or damaged by frost.

Now is a great time to build walkways and retaining walls.

When pruning and clearing evergreen shrubs, compost or chip the clippings so they can be recycled in your garden.

Fertilize blooming plants such as pansies, dianthus and flowering kale to keep blooms coming.

Use slug bait (or traps) to control **snails** and **slugs** on bedding plants.

Finalize vegetable garden in preparation for planting next month. Consider adding drip or soaker irrigation for more efficient watering.

Control winter **weeds** with regular mowing or completely removing them (especially the roots, any parts remaining will resprout) by hand or with a weeding tool.

Side-dress leafy vegetables and onions with a slow-release fertilizer every two to four weeks. - *LR*

Take care of yourself; watch out for drying skin, especially on back of hands and knuckles.

Use hand lotion often, even though you may not be in the garden. - *me*

3rd WEEK:

This is the beginning of the coldest part of winter (Jan.15 to Feb.15), though it may be hard to believe at times. - *me*

January is a good month to prune oak trees. Oak wilt is not active in the coldest part of winter. Still follow-up with pruning paint (or better, with a latex paint).

Wear old clothes when handling frozen banana stalks. Their oozing sap stains everything.

Go after "Christmas tree" mulch at the Bitters Rd. Brush Site.

Start tomatoes, peppers and warm-weather seeds now so they will be ready for 1 gal. or larger containers in early March.

Harvest brussels sprouts from the bottom of the stalk as they mature. You will have the healthful greens through late spring.

Be careful not to overwater bluebonnets. They are very sensitive to soggy conditions.

Watch for caterpillars on cabbage, Texas mountain laurel and bluebonnets. They can strip plants quickly. Spray with *Organospray*, Bt., *Sevin* or *Malathion*. - CF

Prune mondograss and liriopie back to maintain symmetry in the foliage and to remove tattered leaves that survived the previous summer. You don't have to prune the grasses every year, but, if they need a trim, it's fine to cut. Use sharp shears (probably the best choice), a well-sharpened mower or a strong line trimmer to cut through their fibrous leaves. Don't let your cutting device tear the leaves or pull them loose. Finish the trimming before the new growth starts to emerge in late winter.

Nandinas are pruned unlike almost any other plant. Your ultimate goal should be to have plants that are full and compact clear to the ground. Even in the dwarf forms, their tendency is to grow tall and lanky. You should remove the tallest canes at the ground late each winter. As an example, if a given plant has 10 stalks, cut the tallest 4 or 5 stems within an inch or 2 of the soil line. That way, as they resprout and grow, the new foliage will fill in lower voids. - NS

Plan new flowerbeds and design drip-irrigation systems for beds to conserve water and provide good moisture coverage.

Select bare-root fruit trees and balled-and-burlapped trees, shrubs and vines from nurseries for planting.

Check for bagworms on narrow-leaf evergreens such as junipers and cedars. Pull and destroy them (could feed them to birds - me). - LR

4th WEEK:

Spray selective grass herbicides in wildflower patches to remove cold-season grasses.

Cauliflower that is not covered will turn yellow. Secure the leaves over the head with rubber bands or clothespins for pure white heads.

Onion plants are available at area nurseries. Plant them 3 in. apart and harvest every other plant for green onions. Large bulbs will be ready to harvest in May.

For shady, sheltered areas or containers, consider primula and cyclamen for winter color.

Do not fertilize your lawn now (does not matter how warm it might be or what's coming up green!). Only the winter weeds will benefit. Wait until May 1. Aerate and top-dress your lawn with compost ($\frac{1}{2}$ " for St. Augustine and $\frac{1}{4}$ " for Bermuda grasses) to restore compacted soil.

Bunny Bloom larkspurs should be available now in the nurseries. Plant them in full sun or in a location that receives morning sun. - CF

Finalize your vegetable garden design in preparation for planting next month. Consider adding drip or soaker irrigation for more efficient watering.

Work compost or manure into beds in preparation for spring vegetable planting. - EO

Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) are showing up at area bird feeders. They

leave their wintering grounds up in Canada (from Nova Scotia to Alaska) and head as far as Costa Rica, Cuba and the Bahamas. They can be friend or foe, their antics are a delight to watch, but they will literally take over a feeding station and devour everything (on the positive side they are insect eaters as well).

* In updating this collection of useful tips, I have come across several comments, instructions and chemicals that are being replaced with newer techniques and materials. In some cases, I do not want to change what others have written, but I need to bring "them" up-to-date by putting a "(?)" right behind the point in question and maybe adding my two-cents-worth. - *me*

Many thanks to my contributors for sharing their wisdom so I can learn and share it with you.

CF - Calvin Finch, Bexar Co. extension agent for horticulture, Texas Agriculture Extension Service (courtesy S.A. Express-News)

NS - Neil Sperry, Texas horticulturalist, Publisher "Neil Sperry's GARDENS" and contributor to S.A. Express-News; visit his website at www.neilsperry.com

JB - Jerry Baker, America's Master Gardener, aka "The Yardener".

EO - Edna Ortiz, Bexar Co. extension agent for horticulture, Texas Agriculture Extension Service (courtesy S.A. Express-News)

WBC - Wild Birds Centers

LR - Lynn Rawe, Bexar Co. extension agent for horticulture, Texas Cooperative Extension Service (courtesy S.A. Express-News); visit their website at www.bexar-tx.tamu.edu.

me - MG, CR Brian D. Townsend, can be e-mailed at briandt@juno.com.