

NOVEMBER TO DO LIST

Please note, most of the information shared here was obtained from Research-based sources (see contributor acknowledgements below), and from individual 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)

When the world wearies, and society ceases to satisfy, there is always the garden.

1st WEEK:

If you are going to plant trees and shrubs this fall, select xeriscape plants that will fit qualifications for the SAWS's landscape rebate. Visit their website @ www.SAWS.org , to see more. (It's a good time to plant shrubs. Consider hollies and nandinas, evergreen shrubs with colorful fall berries. They do well in sun or shade - EO)

Young deciduous trees and shrubs requiring transplanting can be moved as soon as they enter dormancy.

Last call to defoliate young specimens of hybrid Crepe Myrtles to induce dormancy.

Divide irises and day lilies now. Replant the rhizomes and bulbs in full sun in compost-enriched soil.

Brush your hand across a branch of your peach or plum trees. If leaves fall off, it is time to spray with *Kocide 101* (*Kocide* will defoliate the trees - EO), or any copper hydroxide product, to prevent bacterial diseases.

Heavy rains can cause some leaf drop on trees. Time is the best cure; do not fertilize plants showing stress from leaf drop.

SLUGS and SNAILS are feasting on pansies, bluebonnets and other plants. Apply slug and snail bait or put out beer traps to slow them. The bait also will control pill bugs. (* A thrifty way to control slugs and snails and help with recycling; take a 3-liter soda bottle, cut the top third off the empty bottle, push the top portion into the body of the bottle ((with the spout down inside!)). Use two or three staples around the rim to hold the parts together. Pour snail bait or use some bread with a little beer down the "funnel" and lay your trap down horizontally among your plants and the snails will come calling. When it's full or you're just tired of looking at it, just dispose of it and make another one. - me)

Leaves are too valuable to put in the garbage. Mow them and let the material decompose on the lawn. It also makes good mulch or compost.

Seed nasturtiums, sweet peas, radishes, carrots, rutabagas, English peas, sugar snap peas, onions, collards and spinach to supplement cole crop transplants in the winter garden.

Sow Elbon (Cereal) Rye in bare parts of veg. garden as both a nematode trap crop and a "green manure" to be tilled into soil in late winter. - CF

Plant petunias and stock now so they can develop before winter cold.

Set out alyssum, asters, snapdragons, calendulas and stock for winter color in your yard.

Harvest pecans as they fall to the ground to maintain nut quality.

Enjoy the bright flowers of salvias, Cape honeysuckle, firebush, firespike, esperanza and poinciana, which will bloom until the first serious cold wave.

Kill grasses invading flowerbeds or ground covers with *Poast* (?) or *Ortho Grass-B-Gon*. - EO

Remove debris (leaf litter falling from the plants themselves, leave the mulch in place) from

flowerbeds and gardens to control disease and insects.

Apply winterizer to your lawn (should be done by mid-month) to increase cold hardiness. Read label directions carefully to ensure proper coverage.

Start collecting seeds of your favorite plants now. Baby food jars make great storage containers. Label the jar with the plant name and the date you collected the seeds.

Plant onions, radishes and spinach, English peas, sugar snap peas and collards. Continue harvesting fresh vegetables from your garden.

Plant dianthus, snapdragon, alyssum and flowering kale transplants. - *LR*

Hibernation begins at this time for the ladybug, and goes through to January. Clean out Ladybug house, if Ladybug's are hibernating, replace compost with fresh material (the geckos like the house better than the ladybugs).

With the time change comes early nightfall (like sunset right before you get home from work!), you could start pulling out some of those thanksgiving and/or Christmas lights (yeah, yeah, I know) and decorations and start making plans. -*me*

Great Texas Garden Tips - When planting for effective color, group your selections in mass or drifts because they will stand out in the landscape. *) November is normally a great time to visit public gardens because these visits provide working examples of how fall-cool/cold season color is utilized; plus, they provide opportunities to view permanent plantings with their fall colors expressed. *) Leek, lettuce, mustard, onion, radish, rutabaga, Swiss chard, and turnip may be planted, especially during the early part of November, for a fall vegetable garden. *) This is the last call for planting rye grass as a temporary cool/cold season lawn because the nights are getting too cool for quick and high percentage germination of the seeds. Plant early in the month if possible. - *DG&DG*

Birdscaping hints: * Plan and plant ahead. Remember, annuals yield quick results; perennials produce seed crops year after year. Be sure to provide a good mix of native /well adapted plants in your scheme and allow for some naturalizing! * Resist the temptation to neaten or "deadhead" seed-laden plants. * In fall and winter, make the birdscape even more inviting by offering energy-packed suet, protein-rich peanut butter, and a source of (and probably the most important point) clean water (heated, if necessary). - *DMS*

In Our Rose Garden: The fall colors and bloom size of our November blooms here in South Texas are a sight to see, the cooler weather slows down the growing speed, increasing size and intensifying colors. Believe it or not, we need to start planning for the new rose year coming up. * Now's the time to step back and evaluate the performance (spring, summer and fall) of the roses in your garden. This includes their growth, bloom production, disease resistance, etc. If they are first year bushes you might consider giving them another growing season in the garden since some varieties perform better the second year. If you keep records, now is the time to make your notes. After evaluation, keep up winter maintenance: **A) Watering-** As your roses complete their blooming period, you can cut back on water usage, but still keep the beds moist. **B) Spraying-** Continue a weekly program. For blackspot and mildew use *Triforine* (formerly *Funginex*) (1Tbsp.) per gallon of spray. Make sure you spray top and bottom of the foliage to get complete coverage. * Warning - Several gardens in our area have had moderate to severe problems with SCALE. Check your older canes low on the bush for small (2mm) gray bumps. If you have scale they will be in the hundreds or thousands. New canes are most likely not affected or to a much lesser extent. Maximum strength *Cygon 2E*(?), very light (horticultural) oil spray, or even *Orthene* may help (in February, the use of preventative sprays using dormant oil spray at least twice,

mixed with one of the above insecticides during the pruning and yearly clean-up, should be part of spray program). **C) Feeding**- all feeding should have been discontinued the middle of October. **D) Shovel Pruning**- Now's the time to start shovel pruning (i.e. digging out) any bushes that you feel didn't do well in your garden this year. You really should give a rose bush 2 to 3 years to fill out before making a final judgment. The bushes you are removing from your garden can be potted up and brought to a future meeting or given away; those bushes could make a great addition in some other rosarian's garden! If the plant has a pest problem, like root nematodes (treat as needed); if the plant has a virus or bacterial problem such as root gall, it's better to discard it and either remove the soil or use a bactericide, like *Consan Triple Action 20*, soil drench (* Gall can be cut away from a diseased plant with some success, but if you don't get every little piece of it, regeneration of the gall can occur). **E) Soil Revitalization**- Rework your soil where you have taken roses out by adding organic matter (compost) and Poteet red sand in equal portions (or Gardenville's "Rose Soil" mix), and to that mix add some coarse vermiculite or other good water holding material. Also inspect for invading tree roots and take action to kill or curb their advancement. **F) Winter Dressing**- Add a two inch covering to your rose beds of either compost or manure (horse manure is best) toward the middle or end of this month. **G) Stabilizing**- Bushes that are extremely tall should be stabilized so they won't rock back and forth in the upcoming winter winds. Using two concrete reinforcement rods (rebar), 24 to 36", cover the rods with old pieces of garden hose and drive them into the ground on both sides of the shank of the rose bush. The pieces of garden hose will prevent the shank from rubbing up against the rods and causing some damage.

A Year in the Rose Garden: by A.J."Pop" Warner

It is time now to stop drastic cutting. Continue to use your roses but cut with short stems. Keep all the leaves are essential to this process. The mineral content of the canes is of primary importance in determining their cold hardiness, and the starch content has a lot to do with the vigor of the spring growth.

There is some disagreement regarding the effect of late fertilization on cold hardiness. The writer has observed that late fertilization actually improves cold hardiness in his garden. However, the traditional wisdom is to stop feeding by October. In view of the high price of fertilizer most of us will want to be "traditional".

Many rosarians' advocate spraying with fungicide as long as they have leaves. If spraying becomes too much of a chore after roses reach some dormancy it may be discontinued. In the view of many this is a dangerous philosophy but in the editor's garden it has not proven harmful.

Water becomes less critical as the plants go dormant but the beds should not be allowed to get too dry. Normally in our area little attention to watering is needed in November or December, but in the unlikely event we get extended drought in these months, infrequent but deep watering is in order. We are advised by some writers to continue watering heavily, while others say withhold water to induce dormancy. Neither course can be sustained by logic or local experience so it would seem reasonable to relax and let nature take its course.

Early November is the time to develop that new bed you meant to start in September. It will be messy when the December rains set in. And the Canadian roses will be arriving soon.

Use all the organic matter you can find, such as rotted manure, ground bark, compost, peat moss, etc., up to 50% of the total. Add some builder's sand and enough good soil to

hold the mix together. About 10-15 lbs. of superphosphate and a like amount of gypsum spread over the bed area before starting to fill it is a good investment. Sewage sludge if obtained from a source that is free of industrial waste has proven beneficial in our area. It is an excellent source of trace elements and if well-incorporated into the soil, improves its water retention capability. Fill the bed with soil mix, and then stir with a spade or roto-tiller, pulling up some of the underlying clay into it.

Take another tour of your fellow rosarian's gardens and get their experience with the new varieties you don't have. Besides the ever-enjoyable fellowship, you may save yourself some expense and bed space.

Mark the roses you plan to dig up with the names of people who like them and would like to have them. Often one man's "dog" is another man's "pet". Many non-exhibitors could not care less whether a rose has classic "show form". Make some cuttings of your favorite roses. Many should root now, root some understock for next spring's budding.

In Our Herb Garden: If above average temperatures prevail; wait until after Nov. 15 to plant cool-weather plants such as pansies. Fall fertilizing is even more important than spring. Use a fast release 3-1-2 fertilizer - don't use anything high in nitrogen. - *EW*
* Complete harvesting of cold sensitive herbs and apply compost as winter mulch if not done in Oct. Mature herb plants will be high in essential oils and this is a good time to preserve them. - *Herbs: A Resource Guide for San Antonio*

Time change, time to fall back. You lose a lot of evening daylight for the next couple of months, so get as much outside stuff done as possible and save the inside stuff for next week. Also, this is a good time to check your smoke alarm and change the battery.

2nd WEEK:

Keep tract of weather - *"Only a fool or a newcomer will try to predict Texas weather."*

When should a gardener use frost protection? I wholeheartedly rely on our local weatherman, and subtract a degree factor of "8" for safety. For instance, if your favorite weather forecaster predicts a low of 36 F, you'd better cover your plants. If the forecaster is right and the temperature only falls to 36 F, you've merely experienced a trial-run plant protection alert.

There is a reason for this discrepancy in accuracy. When the earth is experiencing rapid radiation cooling, heat is rising rapidly. Therefore, it's warmer 4 feet off the ground than at ground level, and the lowest few feet are dramatically colder. Just barely above the ground is the coldest. A thermometer can read 33 to 34 F at 4 feet off the ground, yet there can be frost on your turfgrass. If you were to place a thermometer at grass level, one at 2 feet, and another at 4 feet, the temperature can be 33 to 34 F. At 2 feet it can be 31 F, and at grass level it will be 29 to 30 F. There can actually be a one-degree drop per foot.

Because temperatures can differ at various heights off the ground, the National Weather Service places its recording instruments exactly 4 feet above ground. Gardeners would do well to do the same, so as to have a common frame of reference. Just remember that on a dry, cold night the ground can be as much as 4 to 5 degrees colder (or as little as 0 to 1 degree colder), depending on cloud cover, dew point and wind. - *JMP*

Be prepared to mulch freeze-sensitive and "new" roses, (transplants & seedlings) plants as they may succumb to frost or freeze. Don't forget "Airport" landfill on Bitters Rd. as source of "inexpensive" compost for mulching. Mulch deeply all subtropical perennials (listed earlier) until March. - *me*

November is a good month for tree and shrub planting. Consider small trees at the edge of shade trees to form an understory. Redbuds, standard yaupon holly, Texas persimmon, loquat and Texas mountain laurel do well.

If above average rain has struck tomatoes, inspect plants and leave green fruit on the vines as long as they have green leaves. Harvest the coloring fruit to reduce stress on the plant (you may want to pull back the mulch for a day or two to allow for some drying, then put mulch back and add more if necessary - *me*).

If you want to save caladium tubers, dig them up and let them dry for 10 days. Remove the dirt and leaves, then pack them in peat moss so they don't touch each other. Dust with a fungicide and store where temperatures stay above 50 degrees.

Prepare flowerbeds and plant pansies where they will get at least 4 hrs. of sun per day. Still time to plant hardy annuals like violas and snap dragons for winter and early spring color. Plant in a bed with good soil and lots of organic matter and add blood meal for an extra boost. Most need sunny sites.

Plant daffodils, irises and day lilies now.

Clean martin houses of sparrow debris and close them up until mid February.

Last chance to feed lawns for fall and reap full benefit of winterizing function. Do not use the slow-release fertilizers used in spring & summer; "winterizer" has quick-release nitrogen. (* It's a toss-up whether to refertilize the lawn after a heavy (3" or more at once) rain has washed out recently applied fertilizer. If there is damage, as in browning or fungus, wait until spring.) Lawnmower cutting height should be at its lowest setting by now. Make sure short-day bloomers (Poinsettia, Christmas Cactus and Kalanchoe) are not exposed to artificial light at night.

Some live oaks may be dropping their leaves early. Like many blooming peach trees, they are confused by the hot, dry summer. No treatment is necessary; they will recover.

Check oak trees for the flare roots. If none is visible, the tree is at risk from basal rot and other afflictions. Remove the extra soil to expose the roots, or call a tree-care company. -

CF

Plant dianthus, ornamental cabbage and kale, pansies, phlox and Shasta daisies.

Do not plant beets, carrots, cabbage, lettuce or mustard too deep. - *EO*

Dispose of diseased leaves from roses, Indian hawthorns, photinias, or fruit trees to reduce the chance of reinfecting the plants.

Put out birdseed for migrating birds. Shallow dishes of water will help quench their thirst.

Look for HORNWORMS and CABBAGE LOOPERS on vegetable plants. Both can be treated with Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), products such as *Thuricide*, *Dipel* or *Bio-Worm*.

Prepare beds for spring bulbs. Bulbs need well-drained soil and plenty of organic matter.

Wait until December or January to plant bulbs.

Harvest cold-sensitive herbs. You can dry or freeze them for later use. - *LR*

Crickets can make a pretty good thermometer in a pinch. They chirp at a rate that increases as the temperature rises: the higher the temperature, the greater the number of chirps per minute. Count the number of chirps they make in fourteen seconds and that will be the temperature at their location.

Gardeners often plant container-grown trees and shrubs because they can be planted any time of year. Unfortunately, the root systems of container-grown plants can be girdled by the containers. Before planting, check to see if that is the case with your plants. If so, either spread the roots out or prune them with a knife. The goal should be to get them

growing in a normal manner rather than in a circle. - TGS

Making Arrangements: (by THL, w/ Dale Rohman, aka America's Flower Man)

Keep bouquet arranging simple - *) Start with a suitable vase. A ginger jar or any container with a narrow neck is good. The small opening helps keep stems in place. *) Fill vase with half hot and half cold tap water. Add ribbon (or other garnish) to the container, if desired. It's easier to tie the ribbon before the vase is filled with flowers. *) Add 1/2-teaspoon chlorine bleach and 1/2 teaspoon sugar for every 1 1/4 cups of water. Bleach kills bacteria in the water, and sugar feeds the flowers. *) Strip stems of leaves that would be immersed in water. Submerged foliage causes the water to sour. *) Using a sharp knife, cut stems at a wide angle. The cut exposes more stem surface to absorb water. Immerse in water immediately after cutting. If you remove the stem from the water, it will begin to form a seal immediately and will need to be recut. Never cut flowers with scissors. It mashes the stems, and they can't draw water. *) Begin working with the fullest flowers to create a framework for your arrangement. Place these short stems in the vase at 45-degree angles, crisscrossing the stems. These flowers will support taller flowers. *) Measure stems against the container before cutting. The entire arrangement should be about 1 1/2 times higher than the container. Left too tall, the flowers will look like they are running away with the vase. *) Insert the "star" flowers. Turn the vase as you work so you see it from 360 degrees. Cut stems at various lengths, but don't leave stems too long. *) Resist the urge to fluff as you go. Each stem doesn't have to be placed precisely. The arrangement will come together as you add to it. However, if you're not satisfied with your creation, take time to take it apart and start over (Remember to recut stems if they come out of the water). "Trust you eye, it's an individual work of art!" *) Add accent material. Use sturdy stems to support flowers that want to flop. *) Finish with a flourish (throw something in that will add diversity with a natural touch and height. *) Know when to stop. Concentrate on the natural foliage on stouter stems, and don't worry about excess greens.

Special arrangements - Flowers are always special, but a little creativity can elevate them to extraordinary. *) Add fruits and vegetables to arrangements. Use a wooden skewer as a stem for artichokes, apples, and other produce. After the flowers fade, the fruits and vegetables can be eaten. *) Anything that holds water can be a vase. Pitchers are great for flower arrangements because they have small necks (a clean soda bottle can be used for small bouquets). Shop flea markets and garage sales for clever vases. *) Create your own containers. Coffee cans with candy canes glued around the outside and tied with a ribbon or galax leaves glued on in fish-scale fashion. Square boxes with a small vase fitted inside also stir visual interest, especially when placed on a round table. Spray paint the box or cover it with wrapping paper or fabric.

Seize the moments - These tips will make flowers last longer. *) Condition flowers in warm water for at least an hour before arranging. Add 1/2-teaspoon chlorine bleach and 1/2 teaspoon sugar for every 1 1/4 cups water to zap bacteria and feed the flowers. *) For flowers with lots of petals, such gerbera daisies, use candle wax to seal the petals into the calyx (the cuplike part between the stem and petals). Simply hold a lighted candle so it drips onto the back of the flower. *) Cut stems at an angle with a sharp knife to expose more surface for absorbing water. *) The shorter the stem, the longer the flowers last. Water doesn't have to travel as far up the stem. *) Add a splash of vodka or gin to water to keep tulips from flopping. *) Change water daily. Always use warm water.

Picking flowers - Choose flowers with dark green foliage. That indicates the flowers are

fresh. *) Select budding flowers; they will last longer. *) If flowers are already open, petals should not be translucent. *) When selecting flowers, picture the room where they'll be displayed and the container. Choose hues that contrast with the room for a stunning display. *) If combining colors in one bouquet feels overwhelming, select different flowers in a monochromatic palette. Varying tones and textures will add interest. *) Can't make a decision but want to make a statement? Mass one type of flower in a single vase, "Just 10 gladiolas in a tall vase is stunning". If you're using a clear vase, add marbles or lemons or limes to the container before filling with water. (*See also FEB2DO list*)

3rd WEEK:

Keep an eye out for the Leonids Meteor Showers. Check out the dates when it's due, it is considered to be one of the more spectacular sights in the heavens to behold. - *THMag*
Have plastic, blankets (do not lay plastic directly against plants) and a mechanic's light (with a 60 to 100W. bulb for heat) ready to protect citrus, tomatoes and other cold-sensitive plants (keep in mind, 40 is near freezing to some plants). Our first freeze usually arrives in late November, with the actual freeze typically coming on the following night after a severe cold front arrives. - *me*

Finish winterizing your landscape. Remember to water broad-leafed evergreen shrubs and St. Augustine grass every two weeks during winter and especially when forecast calls for temperatures below 24 degrees.

If you want to protect the stem of your **banana tree** during winter to increase the chances of having fruit next summer; first, cut the stalk to 4 ft., wrap the stalk with newspaper and secure it with duct tape. Then, put a wire cage (a tomato cage will work) around the stalk and stuff it full of leaves. That will provide insulation to protect the blooms that developing in the stalk.

Back in the 18th century, folks used to lay banana skins in planting holes since they would rot quickly and supply calcium, magnesium, sulfur, phosphates, sodium and silica to the new plants. - *TGS*

Check all (plant) containers for proper drainage and condition of plant (worn-out soil, root-bound, poor quality potting soil, etc.) for winter storage. Re-pot to a larger container, and with a high quality potting soil, or cut off an inch around the root ball so you can add more potting soil.

Papayas are not cold hardy. Be prepared to harvest the fruit when temperatures below 36 degrees are forecast.

Paint all wounds on oak trees to prevent the spread of oak wilt.

Clean up gardens after first freeze. Any plants with BLIGHTS or MITES should be thrown away, not composted.

Sow wildflower seeds. Bluebonnet transplants are available at area nurseries. Plant them 2 ft. apart, water them once and apply snail bait. They won't grow much until March. Be careful not to overwater. Plant pansies between them for color until April.

If you want a challenge, plant sweet peas on a trellis. The color and fragrance are unmatched if the plants do not freeze or get too hot.

This is still an excellent time for planting trees, even living Christmas trees. - *CF*

Late blooming firespike, cape honeysuckle, hibiscus and firebush are attracting migrating birds. Keep feeders clean and freshly stocked, and birdbaths/ water bowls clean and full. -

EO

Repair lawn and garden equipment. Sharpen mower blades and drain equipment of old gas

before storing. Check your irrigation system for any broken heads or emitters.

This is a good time to build a compost bin. Leaves can be raked and composted and ready for spring gardening.

Take advantage of the off-season for contractors and consider building decks, retaining walls or pools. - *LR*

Are your seeds duds or studs? To tell the good from the bad from the ugly, test your annual seeds by dumping them in a bowl of water. The duds float, while the "studs" sink to the bottom. - *JB*

Get out all the Christmas lights, stuff and set up (Be creative - not competitive!). - *me*

4th WEEK:

Brown patch can be a problem throughout a mild winter. Take appropriate measures to control it early (if it develops, use a turficide labeled for your grass according to directions). Make sure St. Augustine grass is cut to its lowest level and avoid watering at night.

With the cool weather, you won't need to mow your lawn so frequently. Have the blade sharpened and run the gas tank dry if you won't be using the mower for a while.

Paperwhites have probably emerged in many neighborhoods. A light application of fertilizer (1/2 cup per 20 square feet) is useful.

Plant spinach transplants for a nutritious, attractive vegetable that can be harvested all winter.

Snails and slugs are active with the soggy, cool weather. Apply baits to protect cool-weather plantings.

Sunflower seeds in your bird feeder will attract chickadees, nuthatches, cardinals, blue jays, house finch and gold finches (GOLD FINCHES should be arriving from their migration; time to set out their feeder out). Use the metal, weight-sensitive feeders to exclude squirrels and white-wing doves.

If deer visit your garden, but you still want winter and early spring color, plant flowering kale, ornamental cabbage, snapdragons and bluebonnets. The deer don't seem to find them as tasty as other plants. Be careful of rutting deer, they have been known to attack people and pets.

Keep potted (forced) Poinsettias away from cold or hot drafts, but near a sunny window. Do not let them get too dry. - *CF*

Plant any remaining wildflower seed you have.

There is still time to plant pansies, violas (Johnny jump-ups), flowering cabbage and flowering kale.

Mulch begonias, plumbago and firecracker bushes well.

Tomatoes, peppers, okra, beans, and Southern peas will continue producing as long as warm weather prevails.

Buying a cut Christmas tree? Saw off the bottom 2 inches and place in 4 to 5 " of (sugar) water overnight or long enough for the tree to absorb the liquid. Spray with an anti-transpirant. - *EO*

FIRE ANT mounds pop up after rains. Spot them and treat with *Amdro* or other fire ant baits.

Chose yaupon holly trees now if you want female plants that produce berries. Selecting now while the berries are showy is a sure way to get ones that you want - *LR*

In the event of a freeze warning, here are your biggest concerns:

* Plants that are dry are vulnerable. If it's been a while since you had rain or ran the sprinklers, consider irrigating before the cold arrives. Dry plants will always be hurt worst. That's also true for new pansy beds and turf that has been planted this fall.

* Plants that are growing in containers are most likely to have damage. Their soil balls freeze where plants in the ground would not. Loosely speaking, you sacrifice about 20 degrees of winter hardiness when you have plants above ground.

* Don't leave hoses attached to faucets. Wrap exposed pipes to protect against freezing. Drain all hose-end sprinklers. Water expands as it freezes and has the power to rupture pipes and equipment.

* Gardeners in the southern half of Texas, where temperatures are expected to reach freezing for the first time this fall, need to be sure all tender plants that are going to be saved are brought into protection.

* If you have a greenhouse, be sure the heat source is functioning properly. Have a back-up heat source in case of power outage.

* If you're buying a poinsettia in the next few days and if temperatures are below 40 degrees, have your car warm as you get ready for the trip home. Do not let it be exposed to freezing temperatures for more than a few seconds. Covering it with a lightweight fabric or even paper can give you several minutes longer.

In short, use your common sense and prior experiences to cope with this cold spell. While it's going to be unpleasant and a big change from what we have grown to know and love these last several days, it should not present any clear and present danger to the majority of our Texas plantings. - NS

"For anyone who, like me, winters *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* in the garage or house," writes William Scheick, "there's hope in retarding low-light leaf-drop. In the April-June, 2009, issue of [Hort Technology](#) three researchers reported the benefit of adding a small amount of table sugar (3%) and a trace of citric acid (5 millimolar) to a standard plant fertilizer solution with an acidic pH of 5. About 60% of hibiscus leaves treated with this solution lasted 24 weeks, in contrast to untreated plants completely defoliating after a mere 12 weeks. The finding here might be applicable to other indoor plants inclined to shed leaves in low-light settings."

Stored pots that you plan to recycle can contain fungi and pathogens that could be harmful to the plants you plan to grow in them. To avoid that problem, mix a little bleach in some water (about 1 part bleach to 9 parts water) and pour the mixture in and over the pots before reusing. - TGS

Christmas decorating is in full swing; don't wait to get the good stuff for your landscaping designs! - me

* 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.

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TGS - Texas Gardener Seeds, e-newsletter from Texas Gardener Mag.; visit their website at www.texasgardener.com.

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THMag - Texas Highways Magazine

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