



the *Trumpet Vine*

Serving the Community — Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Winter 2007

Volume II, Issue 1

www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org

LOUDOUN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER MONTHLY MEETINGS

FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC Meetings are held at the Virginia Tech Extension Office, 30B Catoctin Circle SE, Leesburg at 7 pm

DECEMBER 18 - 29

Happy Holidays

Save your plant questions! The Help Desk is closed!

JANUARY 4

"All Natural Farming"

Shawna DeWitt and Attila Agoston, Farm Managers of Mountain View Farm, part of the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, share their experiences and show different aspects of their farm.

FEBRUARY 8

"The Plant Explorers"

Karen Rexrode, former owner of Windy Hill Plant Farm, is one of our favorite speakers. We look forward to beginning each year with her inspirational talks.

MARCH 1

"Orchids"

Join us in March to hear Leslie Blischak's talk on orchids. Her expertise is in Agriculture and Natural Resources with Loudoun County's Extension Service.

Winter — the Garden Planning Season

Gardens can be splendid places during the winter! Get your camera, pencil and paper for notes, and a basket for gathering natural materials to make holiday decorations.



Viewing your gardens when they're barren allows you to see the beauty that is hidden during the other seasons. Take pictures and notes of ideas for next spring, summer, and fall that come to mind as you're strolling through your winter wonderland.



Look for interesting branches, attractive bark, decorative fruit / pods, and colorful berries to make holiday arrangements or "spruce" up houseplants. Collect greenery and use wire frames and floral tape to make wreaths. Let your love of nature and plant materials inspire your creations!

As you're planning your garden for the next growing season, start a Journal. Store pictures from magazines that you like. List plants, trees, and shrubs that you want to add to your landscape. If you haven't had your soil tested during the past three years, stop by the Master Gardener Help Desk or call to pick one up. Planning now makes your spring planting easier!

Gardeners love books, magazines, and tools! All these make wonderful gifts for the gardener. Add a nice, cozy fireplace and a cup of tea and any gardener can be entertained for hours.

As the winter months go by, check that your plants are properly protected (mulched) from the weather. After ice or snow storms, brush off your trees and shrubs whose branches may break from the heavy weight. Use sand or birdseed to keep your walkways and driveways from being slippery — they don't damage your plants as salt does. Check for any perennials that may have heaved up from the ground and heel them in.

Lastly, if you haven't already done so,
ORDER YOUR SEED CATALOGS!



IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Feature Story | 1 |
| Gardening Events | 2 |
| Winter Flowers | 2 |
| Winter Lawn Care | 3 |
| Winter Trees & Shrubs | 4 |
| Vegetable Gardening | 8 |
| Winter Gardening Tips | 9 |

Winter Gardening Events

Loudoun County Master Gardener 2007 Class

If you are thinking of joining the ranks of dedicated, happy volunteers, there are a few seats left in the 2007 Master Gardener Training class. Learn about horticulture, dig into the dirt at the Ida Lee Demonstration Garden, and help your friends and neighbors in Loudoun County with their gardening questions. Call the Help Desk or go to our website for an application. Classes begin on February 1, 2007. The table shows the topics covered in the class. If you are interested, act now!

| Date | Subject | Date | Subject |
|--------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| Feb 1 | Welcome/Overview/Goals | Mar 8 | Herbaceous Plants & Bulbs |
| Feb 6 | Botany | Mar 13 | Water Quality |
| Feb 8 | Soils & Fertilizer | Mar 15 | Communications |
| Feb 13 | Basic Entomology | Mar 20 | Plant Pathology (diseases) |
| Feb 15 | Propagation | Mar 22 | Plant Damage (diagnosis) |
| Feb 20 | Vegetables | Mar 27 | Pesticides |
| Feb 22 | Small Fruit & Fruit Trees | Mar 29 | Landscape |
| Feb 27 | Turf | Apr 10 | Internship, Demo Garden |
| Mar 1 | Woody Plants | Apr 12 | Help Desk |
| Mar 6 | Pruning | Apr 17 / 19 | Class Presentations |

Winter Flowers

Poinsettias with Bling!

Consumers have many options today when purchasing poinsettias. Breeders over the past few years have developed plants with variegation in plum, burgundy, white, yellow, pink or other unusually colored bracts. Would you like a blue poinsettia or even an orange one to compliment or contrast with the decorations or rooms in your home?



Usually white "flowered" plants are used to produce these non-traditional color offerings. A dye is sprayed onto the plants to produce the desired color and effect. More "bling" is added by dusting the painted plants with glitter! The painted/gilded poinsettias are said to last just as long as the unpainted ones.

I tend to be a traditionalist, but I can turn my imagination loose and envision a home, party, or even a holiday wedding where the painted poinsettias could be used to help create an enchanted, glamorous atmosphere. If you need many plants for the holidays or a party I am sure that with enough lead time you could find a florist or greenhouse grower who would work with you to provide just the color you want.

These painted and dressed-up poinsettias cost more than the traditional colors, but that's because they are new, unusual, and unique. They may be just a passing fancy or they could be here to stay, we will have to wait and see. Check out your local garden centers and florists this holiday season to see what selection they may have that might be right for your holiday decorating.

*Debbie Dillion
Urban Horticulturist*

Holiday Plants

Plants can add a decorative touch to your home during the holiday and many can last to brighten up your home during the winter months.



Cyclamen likes cool temperatures, plenty of sunlight, and not a lot of water. This plant blooms until the weather warms up – then it goes dormant. If you keep it in a cool place with sunlight over the summer, you will see its revival in the fall.

The Christmas cactus also prefers a cool, light environment as well as less water than other houseplants. Putting it in the shade during the summer and back to a sunny location in the fall causes the flowers to rebloom.



The amaryllis is another popular plant for the holidays with their beautiful, big blooms. These can be grown in water or soil. They also like a cool, sunny site.



After your amaryllis finishes blooming, fertilize the plant (they are heavy feeders) and plant it outdoors after danger of freezing passes to enjoy the foliage all summer. In the fall, bring the bulb indoors and store it in a cool, dry place for 6 weeks. Then you can repot it for next year's holiday season.



Try something different with your poinsettia – repot it with bromeliads, caladiums, or ivy – and throw the foil away!



*Janette Sawyer
Master Gardener*

Winter Lawn Care

Erosion in the Landscape

As you prepare your landscape for the winter, include soil erosion prevention in your plans. Soil erosion occurs when soil particles are carried off by water or wind and deposited somewhere else – into a storm drain, a stream, or the bottom of the Chesapeake Bay. Erosion in the home landscape creates unsightly bare areas and deposits mud on driveways and walkways that can then be tracked into the house.

Unprotected soil is susceptible to erosion by winter rains and snows. Look for areas in your landscape that are bare in the winter and should be protected. In the winter, annual flowers and vegetables have died down and above-ground parts of many herbaceous perennials are no longer present. If your soil is not mulched, it is no longer protected from raindrops. Although a raindrop seems small, the force applied by rain to the soil is great and contributes to erosion in several ways. Rain detaches soil particles; breaks down surface soil structure, allowing soil to erode more easily and decreasing future water infiltration; and splashes soil particles

surprisingly long distances – as much as 3' to 6' or so under certain conditions. Mulching bare soil areas protects them from the impact of rain and consequent erosion.

Some erosion creates large gullies in the ground and is easy to spot by even the casual observer. Other times, erosion occurs very gradually and may not be easy to see. Some less-obvious signs that soil from your property may be eroding include soil splashing onto outside walls, sediment collecting in low areas or on pavement, and tree roots gradually being exposed as the soil around them washes away. If you see any of these signs, look for possible erosion sources and take steps to protect that soil.

Your property may need additional mulch after a hard freeze to protect it from winter erosion. In general, making sure your property is well landscaped with healthy plants reduces erosion. Healthy roots hold soil in place, and plants with dense leaf canopies and mulches protect the soil from the rain's impact and runoff.

Debbie Dillion, Urban Horticulturist

Winter Trees and Shrubs

The Challenge of Fall and Winter Garden Color

Spring and summer gardens are easy to plan, regardless of color scheme, because thousands of species and cultivars of annual and perennial flowers grow and bloom during those seasons. Designing color into fall and winter gardens isn't as easy because fewer flowers are available that can survive cold temperatures.



For fall and winter garden color we rely heavily on the leaves, fruit, and bark of woody plants. A tree or shrub already existing in your garden may have red fall leaf color that can serve as the background for a red, white, and blue fall and winter annual or perennial garden. If not, you might want to start a new garden, selecting trees and shrubs with fall and winter color, that is based on our sample designs from *Plant America's Anniversary Garden™* or *America's Anniversary Garden™: A Statewide Corridor and Entrance Enhancement Program* (<http://www.ext.vt.edu/americasgarden/plantlist/corridor.html>).

If you start a new garden this fall or winter, you can design a progression of red, white, and blue flower color for next year starting with the pansies suggested in this publication, the spring bulbs suggested in *America's Anniversary Garden™: Bulbs for a Red, White, and Blue Spring Garden*, and the annuals and perennials suggested in *Plant America's Anniversary Garden™* or *America's Anniversary Garden™: A Statewide Corridor and Entrance Enhancement Program* (<http://www.ext.vt.edu/americasgarden/>).

Authored by Bonnie Appleton, et al. Excerpt from Publication #426-228

For the full article, please see: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/envirohort/426-228/426-228.html>

Christmas Tree Care



Christmas trees absorb between 2 pints and 1 gallon of water per day, so a tree stand that holds at least 1 gallon of water is recommended. Make sure to check the water level daily and supply fresh water as needed.

Never allow the reservoir of your Christmas tree holder to go dry as an air lock can form in the trunk that can keep the tree from absorbing water again.

Low indoor humidity in winter can make cut Christmas trees dry out quickly. Before the needles start to drop from the tree, take it down. Don't try to prolong a festive feeling by endangering your home and family with a dried-out, flammable tree.

*Debbie Dillion
Urban Horticulturist*

Winter Pruning

If you are anxious to get out in your garden pruning is a good winter chore. This is the prime time to prune many of your trees and shrubs. Candidates for winter pruning are:

- Summer-flowering trees and shrubs that bear their flowers on wood produced that year. They should be pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth starts. Examples include beautyberry, abelia, crape myrtle, butterfly bush, summer-blooming hydrangea, and nandina.
- Trees and shrubs without flower or fruit should be pruned when they are dormant, typically in late winter. Some trees bleed after pruning. Pruning these trees – maple, dogwood, birch, elm and walnut – can be delayed until their leaves are fully expanded.

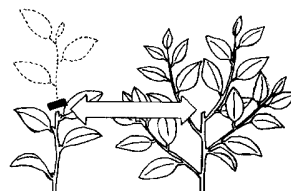
You may choose to prune to:

- Remove undesirable growth. Prune to remove weak, overcrowded growth, water sprouts and suckers. Branches that cross or rub against others should be removed along with branches that grow back toward the center of the tree. You may remove dead or diseased branches at any time, preferably as soon as possible.
- Maintain or reduce plant size. Regular pruning can prevent a plant from outgrowing its space in the landscape. This is especially applicable to shrubbery planted around a house. Reduce the need to prune trees by planting the right tree in the right spot.

Pruning Strategies

Your pruning strategy depends on your goals – are you trying to make a shrub denser or open it up to better air circulation; salvage an old, overgrown shrub or maintain a fast grower?

Heading cuts remove only part of a shoot or limb and encourage side branching and dense growth. Plant tips contain a hormone that direct growth to the tip. This tip growth is called apical dominance. By removing tips you remove apical dominance and make the shrub or plant bushier. The cut should be made just beyond a healthy bud, angled at 45° and facing away from the bud. Use this cut with shrubs that you want to be dense.



Tip pruning is the simplest heading cut that you can make and requires no special equipment, just your thumb and forefinger. Pinch off the tips of branches to stimulate the growth of the side buds and create a fuller shrub.

Thinning cuts remove an entire branch where it meets another limb, the main stem, or the ground. They should be made as close to this junction as possible. These cuts help maintain the plant's natural shape, limit its size, and open up the interior branches to light and air.



Take advantage of winter to examine the form and structure of your trees and shrubs to determine if they can benefit from pruning!

Do not prune spring flowering trees and shrubs such as azalea, forsythia, or lilac at this time.

Virginia Tech publishes pruning calendars for shrubs, evergreens and deciduous trees. See <http://www.ext.vt.edu> and search on "pruning calendar."

Carol Ivory
Master Gardener

Rejuvenation Pruning

Many shrubs that have become overgrown and leggy and have a large amount of unproductive wood respond well to hard pruning. This technique is also known as renovation, renewal and rejuvenation pruning. These strategies depend on the ability of the shrub to send up new shoots from the roots or the base of old branches that have been cut off.

Drastic renovation or extensive rejuvenation involves complete removal of the entire plant 2-12 inches above the ground. Use heavy lopping shears and a pruning saw.



Cut back all main stems making straight cuts across branches to form a low framework.

Remove half of the new canes that develop by mid-summer, and head back some of the remaining canes.

Shrubs that tolerate extensive rejuvenation are: glossy abelia, barberry, beautyberry, butterfly bush, red and yellow twig dogwood, euonymus, flowering quince, forsythia, honeysuckle, hydrangea, lilac, mallow, mock orange, rose-of-Sharon, spirea, and St. John's wort (hypericum). Plants that are stressed or in poor health may not survive this severe pruning.

Renewal, gradual rejuvenation or staged renovation involves hard pruning carried out over two to four years. Remove the tallest and oldest or thickest branches first.



The oldest 1/6 to 1/3 of the stems are headed (identified by the X) at approximately three inches.

Use this strategy if there is any question how the shrub will respond to being cut back, when the shrub is slower growing (many evergreens), or for the sake of appearance.

As with extensive rejuvenation, the plant may respond with an excessive number of new shoots. New growth should be thinned as necessary.

Deciduous plants are best renovated in their dormant season between winter and early spring and evergreens just as they are coming into growth in the spring.

Pruning Tools

Use hand pruners to cut stems up to 3/4 inches in diameter. Two types of pruners are available: bypass and anvil. Bypass pruners have sharpened, curved, scissors-type blades that overlap. Anvil pruners have straight upper blades that cut against flat lower plates. Although anvil pruners are usually cheaper, they tend to crush stems as they cut. Also, the width of the anvil can prevent you from reaching in to get a close cut on narrow-angled stems. Bypass pruners are generally recommended.



Bypass pruners



Anvil pruners

Use lopping shears to cut through branches that are up to 1³/₄ inches in diameter. Loppers have long handles to give you extra reach and better cutting leverage. For heavy-duty pruning jobs, select loppers with ratchet joints or those with gears. Also look for loppers with shock-absorbing bumpers between the blades, to lessen arm fatigue. Again, bypass blades are preferable.



Lopping Shears

Pruning saws have curved blades that cut as you pull them across branches. They should be used for cutting larger branches.



Carol Ivory
Master Gardener

Winter Interest for the Garden

Winter may be one of the more challenging seasons to plan for the gardener, but it can be most rewarding when some of these plants are in the landscape.



Beautyberry / *Callicarpa* requires moist, well-drained soil with full to partial sun. The purple-red berries show in the fall. This is a great plant for winter color, but don't expect to have berries too long as the birds love the fruit and can wipe it out in one eating. It may be pruned after fruit has fallen. A new variety has been introduced with wonderful peachy/ melon colored berries.

***Ilex* x 'Nellie R. Stevens'** is both heat and drought-tolerant while offering traditional holly beauty. It has the excellent vigor of most hybrids and grows more rapidly than some other types. A

broadly pyramidal tree that can reach 30' to 40'— though more commonly grows in the 15' to 25' range. Nellie is a prolific producer of bright red berries and has the advantage — unlike many other holly varieties — of not requiring a male tree



nearby to produce fruit. The red clusters are beautiful in winter until late February or early March, when a flock of cedar waxwings may swoop in and eat all the berries. A new crop then appears in spring. Nellie R. Stevens can be used singly or in mass plantings. A row placed 5' apart and left un-pruned quickly grows to make a perfect hedge. It performs best in full sun. Consistently wet sites can damage its roots.



Harry Lauder's Walking Stick / *Corylus avellana* 'contorta' is worth having just to tell your friends the name. A tree that needs to be planted where it can be seen and appreciated, corylus has

twisted/contorted branches that are best viewed in the winter. In the late winter, small yellow catkins appear. A grafted "tree," suckers need to be removed as they appear to prevent it from reverting to rootstock. They require full-sun to part-shade with well-drained soil.

Cryptomeria japonica is an underused evergreen in our area. With a moderate growth rate, soft, billowy pyramidal shape it is a good substitute for Leyland Cypress, lasts longer, and



provides more interest in the garden. They are fairly adaptable, handling sun to light-shade (though I have seen them in full-shade). Their foliage is awl shaped, bright to blue-green,

smooth to the touch; bronze tones in winter, especially if exposed to wind. They are easy to grow and provide some wonderful foliage for your holiday decorating.

Want something to bloom in February? Try Witch-hazel, a small tree that blooms in late February, leafing out afterwards. There are several varieties offering a color range of cream, yellow, orange to red and maroon. Some are fragrant and some have great fall color. They can handle full-sun or partial-shade.



Nandina domestica is an airy evergreen with bamboo like foliage. It is covered in the fall with clusters of bright red berries that persist into the winter. There are several varieties with



different colored foliage including some variegated ones and several that have brilliant fall color. Dwarf varieties are also available. Nandina tends to get leggy and needs to be pruned to keep its shape. Again, the more sun this plant gets, the better the show. Keep in mind that in some states (Florida, for instance) this plant is considered an invasive species. Although not so invasive in our area, one way of ensuring the protection of your environment is to clip the berries in late winter/early spring, before the birds decide they are hungry enough to eat them.

Becky Phillips
Master Gardener

Vegetable Gardening

Tis' the Season to Plan your Vegetable Garden



Around this time of year children have visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads but what do avid vegetable gardeners have dancing in their head? How about some healthy green plants with succulent red tomatoes hanging off the vine? Children have their Christmas Wish books! Gardeners have their 2007 seed catalogs. Once the holiday lights have given their last twinkle and time seems to slow down in the coldest month of the year it is time to prepare for this season's vegetable garden.

- Consider last year's garden. Too wet or dry, sunny or shady? Do amendments need to be added to reach a desired state of "loam?" Loam is soil that is neither too heavy or light which allows for good drainage and has a healthy supply of tiny organisms working hard.
- Take out your garden journal from last season and review your successes and failures. Write down what you may do differently this time around. If you did not keep one, start one this year.
- What about soil pH? pH in a vegetable garden should generally be 6.5 to 7.0. Perform a soil test every three years to monitor pH. If you need to adjust pH, amendments to your soil should be added several months ahead of planting time. A good pH results in vibrant plants. The Extension office has soil test kits available that can be sent to VA Tech for analysis.
- Have a good read! The experience of others can save you time, money, and maybe a little aggravation. There are many helpful resources whether in a good book or a garden magazine.
- Time...time...time... Did your garden get out of control last season? If so, downsize this year. If you are new to vegetable gardening, start small. Remember to rotate crops yearly so pathogens and insects, which remain in the soil, do not build up and harm new plants.
- Lay out your garden on graph paper. Straight rows lined up like soldiers look very neat but require a great deal of space. If space is limited, try techniques like interplanting, container, or square foot gardening.
- Selecting your seeds. Gardeners who bought seeds from a mail order source previously have begun receiving their seed catalogs already. Most seed companies have Internet sites too. Local nurseries and home improvement centers also offer a selection of seeds although seed variety may be limited to only the most popular. Order and/or buy seeds and transplants early if you must have a particular variety as favorites sell out quickly. Chose vegetables that you and/or your family really enjoy. Pick varieties which match your garden space – dwarf or compact for small spaces.
- Still have vegetable garden questions? The Extension office has a broad array of information sheets to help make those visionary tomatoes into reality. Call the Help Desk to get answers to your questions.



Turning your vision into reality is a great deal of the fun! Hopefully these tips can help you prepare for when the garden clock starts its march again.

*Denise Palmer
Master Gardener*

Winter Gardening Tips



Feeding Our Feathered Friends

Bird feeding is a wonderful way to “decorate” your winter garden with the wonders of nature. A feeder provides additional nutrients to birds during the harsh winter months while allowing you to enjoy their beauty from the warmth of your home. Here are some tips for a successful feeder.

- Offer hulled-seeds in a protected tube or hopper feeder. Try varying the heights of the feeders and spread them out so more birds can use them.
- When it is wet outside, limit the amount of seed on platform feeders to just a handful to avoid having soggy clumps that no one eats.
- Stomp down the snow underneath the feeders to help the ground feeding birds, such as juncos, cardinals, blue jays and doves. Clean- up discarded hulls regularly. Removing debris allows the grass/plants to recover.
- For a winter project, let children smear pinecones with peanut butter, then roll them in birdseed and hang the treats from tree branches.
- Songbirds need a sizable quantity of water in any season for drinking and bathing. All birds need to maintain a ritual of preening their feathers, even in winter. Birdbaths make their life easier, and if they are heated they become a steady source of water when streams and rivers freeze.
- Where wild animals, such as raccoons, opossum, bears or deer, are a problem, fill your feeders every day, but put out only a quantity of seed that the birds can eat before sundown.

For more information visit: www.birdfeeding.org.

from the National Bird Feeding Society

Who Needs Open Space? We all do!

If we live in neighborhoods with designated open space/green space we need to respect the restrictions/covenants applied to them. Open/ green spaces provide aesthetics in highly developed areas, may serve as routes for utilities, attract and provide harbor for wildlife, and provide buffers that reduce soil erosion and catch pollutants which would otherwise enter our streams and eventually the Chesapeake Bay.

Cutting down trees or other large vegetation in these areas should not be done without first seeking permission of the landscape committee or the board. Planting trees is definitely a “no-no” in areas with open/green space designation. Often neighborhood associations or subdivisions contract for maintenance of open/ green spaces. If you plant trees or other landscape plants in these areas it could interfere with their ability to perform the maintenance work as specified. This may cost the association or subdivision money in

the long run. The association or subdivision has the right to require that you refrain from mowing or remove trees/plants you may have planted in open/ green space. You can be asked to reimburse the cost of restoration if you cause damage that must be repaired.



Most neighborhoods or subdivisions have a master landscape plan and usually have a landscape committee as part of the board. They may have plantings still to be done as part of

the master plan and you could contribute to improve your neighborhood with contributions of plant material, money, or time for these areas.

If you want to make a difference in your community, start close to home and get involved with your landscape committee or board!

*Debbie Dillion
Urban Horticulturist*

Keeping Holiday Greens Fresh!

Who doesn't enjoy the natural beauty and wonderful smell of fresh pine or cedar in their home or office during the holidays? I have added several evergreens to my landscape in the past few years and last year had my own fresh greens to use during the holidays. However, heat and dry air in most homes and offices work quickly to rob evergreens of their moisture. They soon lose their lush green color, fragrance, and needles.

All plants transpire – they give off water through their leaves. When we cut evergreens for decorations, they are severed from their water source. Plus, the warmth in the house or office speeds up transpiration. To keep cut greenery fresh, you must provide another source of water and moderate the effects of warm, dry air. Properly cared for greens can last two to three weeks. Those without a water source may need to be replaced much sooner. Here are some recommendations for prolonging the life of cut greens:



- Cut boughs when the tree's limbs are turgid (full of water) in the late afternoon or early morning.
- Stems of woody plants should be crushed and splayed open, or split and peeled back one to two inches if the stem is to be submerged. Cut floral stems on an angle. Remove all needles or leaves that will be submerged in the final arrangement.
- Treat stems or boughs in a floral preservative that you can purchase from a florist or craft store.
- A water holding material, such as the foam like material used by florists for arrangements, can prolong the keeping time of fresh greens. Soak the foam in water then stick the pieces of greenery into it.
- You can substitute natural materials such as potatoes, apples, and Osage oranges (hedge apples) for the foam.
- Arrange large branches of evergreens in buckets with pebbles to keep the stems upright, then fill the container with water.
- Keep arrangements outside or in a cool location such as an unheated garage or refrigerator when not being displayed.
- Check the water level daily in arrangements and refill as necessary.
- Spray boughs and arrangements displayed in warm, dry rooms with a mist of room temperature water several times a day.
- Be sure that any candles included in the decorating scheme are at least ten inches from the greens and that no draft causes them to burn fast. Use only very fresh greens near candles.
- Keep arrangements away from heat sources like registers, lights, and fireplaces.

*Debbie Dillion
Urban Horticulturist*

Valuable Resources

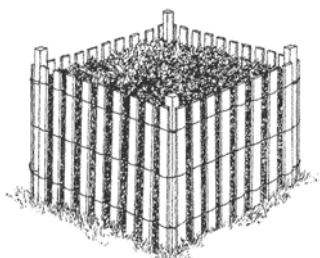
Two VA Tech bulletins that you may find helpful during the winter are:

- *"Managing Winter Injury to Trees and Shrubs"* at www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/envirohort/426-500/426-500.html
- *"Conserving Energy with Landscaping"* at www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/envirohort/426-712/426-712.html

Composting Tips from a Professional

The Green Industry Professional Field Day and Trade Show hosted Dr. Francis Gouin, Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland, Owner / Operator of Upakrik Farm, Deale, MD. Dr. Gouin presented "How to Compost, and How to Enrich Your Soil." He has conducted research in composting since 1972 and his company composts poultry waste, crab shells, as well as grass and leaves from homeowners.

Dr. Gouin provided an interesting formula for breaking down oak and maple leaves. If you do not have a mulching lawn mower or want to speed up the decomposition process of leaves prior to adding them to your compost pile this might be what you need.



Fill a 5-gallon bucket two-thirds full of water, add ½ cup of ammonium nitrate or Urea (45-0-0), ¼ cup of inexpensive liquid dish washing soap. Stir well. Add soil while stirring mixture until you get a thick soupy mixture. Sprinkle mixture over leaves until all leaves are coated. Turn pile over and sprinkle mixture over dry leaves. Add leaves to your compost bin or pile. Keep pile moist. You should notice the leaves start to decompose in 5 to 6 weeks. Mix leaves with greens while building your compost pile.

This formula should work on any leaves with a waxy surface such as oak leaves.

The Ida Lee Demonstration Garden tested Dr. Gouin's formula. Last spring, we had an abundance of oak and maple leaves as well as straw used for winter mulch. We filled one compost bin with the dead branches, straw, and leaves. We then placed green (weeds and grass) and 5" of horse manure on top of this pile and tried to keep it moist. Last August, when we were turning over the compost bin for the first time, the leaves that had been placed in the bottom had not even started to break down.

It was time to put proof to the pudding. Using the non-broken-down material from the old compost bin, and several additional large plastic bags of leaves, we treated the resulting 20 bushels of matter with Dr. Gouin's formula — a total of one 5-gallon bucket. We kept the material moist and, surprisingly, in three weeks, the straw, oak leaves, and other material had crumbled and fallen apart enough to add it to the rest of our compost. Result: Resounding Success!

Dr. Gouin does not recommend a covered compost pile because it restricts the flow of air. He thinks that a properly filled, (50% green with 50% brown) and ample water should be turned twice during the year. If the compost gets too wet it may need to be turned more often.

*Dave Hellums
Master Gardener*

Winter Hints for Houseplants

Houseplants need less watering during the colder winter months and many like no fertilizing so they can sort-of hibernate like we like to.



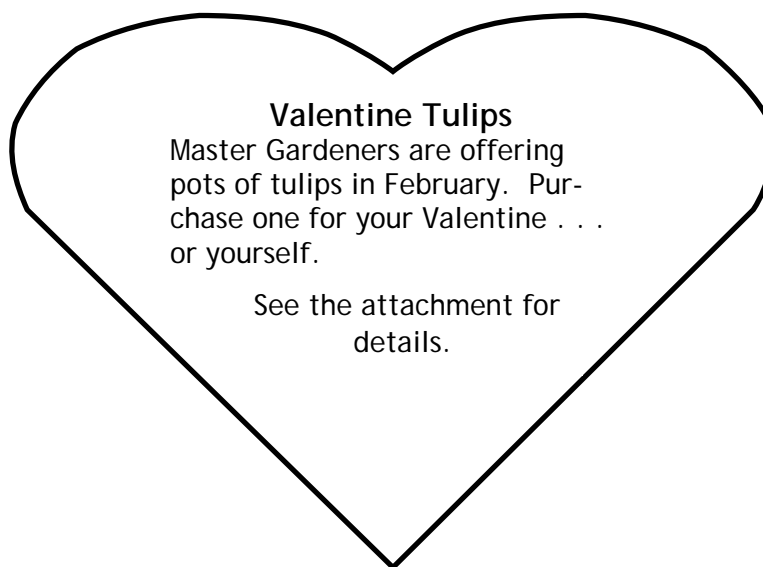
Many gardeners are bringing tender, container plants indoors for the winter. Be sure to check them for any pests to protect your other houseplants. The cold weather also drives pests inside. Indoors, there is no rain to wash them off, there are no natural predators to control them, and the temperature is ideal. Use insecticidal soaps or oil sprays for safe insect control. If you need help identifying an insect, bring a sample of the infected plant to the Help Desk (in the Wachovia Bank building) on Catoclin Circle in Leesburg.



Also, mistletoe is poisonous! Keep it away from children.

| Flowers | Garden | Lawn | Trees / Shrubs |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Check your mulch for winter protection</p> <p>If you have dead plants in pots, break the root ball into chunks and add to your compost</p> <p>Plan additions or changes while you can see your "bare" beds</p> <p>Give perennials that heave the "February stomp"</p> <p>Check stored bulbs, corms, and tubers – discard any that are soft or diseased</p> | <p>Plot your garden on paper and remember to rotate crops</p> <p>Order seeds</p> <p>Cut-back raspberries</p> <p>As soon as ground thaws and is dry enough, start tilling or turning beds. Add compost, balanced fertilizer, or manure.</p> <p>Check for any overwintering diseases or pests and remove</p> | <p>Avoid walking on frozen lawns to prevent winter damage</p> <p>Remove debris, aerate and / or dethatch when soil is dry enough</p> | <p>Gently brush snow from trees and shrubs to prevent damage</p> <p>De-icing salt is harmful, use sand or bird seed to protect your trees and shrubs</p> <p>Prune deciduous trees (oak, maple, and birch) and fruit trees before growth starts; remove all dead or diseased branches and do not compost or keep in yard</p> <p>Prune evergreen hedges (keep base wider than top), shrubs, and trees before growth starts</p> <p>Check for overwintering insects and diseases; apply dormant oil if needed</p> |

Take advantage of occasional warm days to do some pre-season cleanup: remove fallen branches and debris.



Debbie Dillion is the Urban Horticulturist and coordinator of the Master Gardener Volunteer program in Loudoun County. She can be reached at 703-771-5838.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs, activities, and employment are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicap, or political affiliation. An equal opportunity / affirmative action employer.