



January Tips MISCELLANEOUS

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- Take time now to relax and read all of those horticultural magazines and garden books that were put aside during the busy holiday season.
- Draw a map of your garden and make copies of it. Beds stay in the same place year after year, but the crops rotate each year. To plan this year's garden, take a clean copy of the map and fill it in. Use the back of the plan to record notes. Keep each year's plan in a three-ring binder for easy cross-checking of varieties, rotations, etc.
- If you are spreading the ashes from your woodburning stove in your garden, be aware that, over time, you are raising the pH of your soil. Have your soil pH tested before applying any more wood ashes.
- When starting seed, cover the flat with a clear plastic wrap to keep the seeds warm and moist. Professional growers use bottom heat to speed germination, but you can get the same effect by placing flats on top of the refrigerator. As soon as seedlings are up, place the flat under lights to keep the seedlings from getting spindly.
- Light from a windowsill in January or February is often not strong enough to keep seedlings short and sturdy. Supplement natural lighting with a 4-foot fluorescent fixture with three cool-white and one warm-white light tubes about 6 to 10 inches over the flats. Fertilizer (one-quarter to one-half strength) can be applied once every two weeks.
- One way to file seeds as they come in the mail is to use index card tabs to divide a cardboard file box into categories for each vegetable or flower. As new seeds arrive, place them alphabetically in the proper slot -- tomatoes, carrots, etc. Drop notes into the file to remind yourself what is on order to avoid duplication.
- Digging or drilling holes throughout the root zone and partially filling them with fertilizer is not effective, as most of the feeder roots of a tree or shrub are in the upper layer of soil, and drilling puts the fertilizer below the level of the feeder roots.
- Make a sphagnum moss pole for vining plants. Use half-inch mesh hardware cloth, and cut a piece 8 to 10 inches wide (depending on the diameter you want for the pole) and as long as desired. Roll the mesh into a cylinder; fasten together with wire; and stuff with moist, long-fiber sphagnum moss. Place it in the soil and train the vine up the pole. To water the vine, moisten the sphagnum. This also helps anchor the plant to the pole.
- To make economical "sticky stakes" for trapping whiteflies and aphids, cut bright-yellow cardboard or plastic, such as recycled detergent bottles or margarine tubs, into strips. Coat with petroleum jelly. Insert into pots or hang near problem areas.

- Seeds stored under warm, moist conditions deteriorates rapidly. Unless you are sure your seeds were stored under cool, dry conditions, it is safer to buy new packets each season.
- Fear of failure, more than any other reason, keeps non-gardeners from planting their first garden seed or seedling according to the National Garden Bureau. New gardeners need encouragement and praise from friends, never criticism of their first attempts.
- A USDA scientist is experimenting with anesthetic gases, such as nitrous oxide (laughing gas), for long-term seed storage. The anesthetics slow down respiration in seeds, as well as in humans. This technique may be very important for the moist seeds of some tropical plants that lose vitality if dried, giving them a very short storage life.
- As you peruse seed catalogs, choose disease-resistant varieties. They not only make gardening easier, they reduce expenses and environmental pollution from pesticides.
- Dr. Bruce Ames, former organic food advocate and developer of the widely used Ames test for carcinogenic pesticides, now feels organically grown produce is no safer than crops grown using properly applied, chemical pesticides. His change of heart stems from research revealing that fruits and vegetables, as part of their inherent protective mechanism, produce small quantities of natural carcinogenic pesticides in response to stresses, such as pests and disease organisms. The more stress, the more toxins produced.
- In Europe, cut foliage is no longer used just as "filler" for flower arrangements. Greenery arrangements devoid of flowers are becoming very popular. Experiment with the look in your home. Some species to consider are dracena, holly, blue spruce, pine.
- Wood ashes will raise soil pH. Use them only if the pH is under 7.0 based on a soil test. The safe rate of wood ash application to lawn or gardens is 15 to 20 lbs. per 1000 square feet per year (approximately a 5 gal. pail.) Remember, a little wood ash is beneficial, but a lot is not.
- Feed the birds regularly and see that they have water. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts, and bread crumbs as well as bird seed. They won't even complain if the food is stale.
- Spend a cozy evening in front of the fire going through seed catalogs to decide what you are going to plant in this year's garden.
- Don't wait until late in the winter to order seed. Many varieties sell out early.
- A fun, indoor project is building bird boxes for the upcoming nesting season. These can be elaborate or simple; consult your local Extension office for easy do-it-yourself plans.
- There are many prescriptions to keep deer from nibbling ornamentals: fencing, plastic netting, repellents, sprays, hot pepper sauce, egg whites, human hair, lion or tiger manure, and even rock music. Try a few to find out what works for your uninvited pruners.
- One solution to the deer problem found effective in Louisiana is rotten eggs. A mixture of 12 to 18 eggs in 5 gallons of water sprayed over an acre emits enough odor to repel deer, but not offend the gardener.
- Save plastic mesh bags in which oranges usually come; they make ideal storage sacks for air drying gourds, bulbs, and herbs.
- Take down all those Christmas greens before they lose the freshness that made them so attractive during the

holidays.

- Recycle your holiday decorations. Greenery used in ornaments can be used again in the garden. Wreaths and branches stripped from Christmas trees make excellent mulch for protecting newly planted ornamentals. Remove the material in the spring and compost it.
- The pH scale ranges from 1 to 14, with 7 being the point at which soil has a neutral reaction. The majority of ornamental plants, including grasses and vegetables, grow in soils which have a slightly acid reaction, with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. One exception is the ericaceous plants which include azaleas, rhododendrons, andromedas, and blueberries. They require a more acid soil with a pH of 4.5 to 5.5.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dorn, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines, and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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