

# What to do in February 2021

By Kim Kleman, Master Gardener Volunteer with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester County.

## February 8

**Perennials:** Plan your garden to attract more bees, birds, butterflies and other pollinators. Learn how these beneficials support vegetable gardens by attending the “Vegetables Love Flowers” webinar linked below. Bees begin foraging on mild late winter days or very early in the spring. They depend on the resources of the earliest blooming perennials.

**Flowers:** Bring out potted bulbs that were put in cold storage for forcing. (You can also buy pre-chilled bulbs and pot them up.) Gradually expose them to more light and warmth, but do not put them in direct sunlight. Turn the pots every other day so the plants grow evenly. Keep the pots moist and in a few weeks, you can enjoy the cheerfulness of spring indoors. Continue to check your stored dahlias, cannas, gladiolus and other bulbs. Make sure to toss any that are rotten or dried out.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Observe the places in the garden where snow melts first. These are warmer microclimates, where you might plant a vegetable garden or a bed for marginally hardy plants. Sketch out this year’s vegetable garden, making sure to account for sun, access to water, plant height, growing cycles and ease of maintenance, among other factors. If you have not done so already, order seeds.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Assess your property for trees that need to be pruned or removed safely by a professional. Oaks can be pruned at this time without exposure to the beetles that transmit oak wilt. Check that winter plant protection is still in place. Adjust plant stakes and windbreak materials as needed.

**Lawns:** Not much to do while the lawn is dormant, but here’s a trend to watch: What was old is new again. Until the 1950s, clover was intentionally used and valued in lawn mixes because it tolerates mowing, fix nitrogen and can suppress some weeds. Today, there is renewed interest in clover mixes that also support pollinators and other beneficial insects. Research is underway to explore pros, cons, and best management practices for this combination of plants.

**Houseplants:** On bitter cold nights, move houseplants back from windows or cover the glass with thick material, newspaper or cardboard to prevent plants from exposure to drafts and freezing or near-freezing temperatures.

**General:** Reserve your spot for the next webinar in the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester Home Gardening Lecture Series:

*Vegetables Love Flowers*

Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021 from 10:00 to 11:00 am, remote on Zoom

Speaker: Regina Blakeslee, Master Gardener Volunteer and beekeeper. She’ll talk about how vegetables and pollinators thrive when vegetable gardens abound with flowers.

Pre-registration is required: \$5 in advance via check or money order. For information on the lecture series, check out: <http://westchester.cce.cornell.edu/> Questions? Contact CCE at [westchester@cornell.edu](mailto:westchester@cornell.edu) or call 914-285-4640.

## February 15

**Perennials:** If you have your heart set on certain perennials to grow this year, but haven’t placed your order, do it as soon as possible. Popular varieties sell out quickly.

**Flowers:** Valentine's bouquets can last longer if you recut the stems on an angle, discarding any leaves that would be submerged in the vase or container. Place the stems in tepid to warm water right away (alternatively, do the whole process underwater). Use a packet of flower preservative in the water, and display your flowers in a cool place out of direct sunlight.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Set aside a potting area for seed starting and gather necessary supplies such as sterile seed starting mix, trays and pots and other useful equipment such as an electric heating mat to speed germination. Sanitize used flats and pots. Post a seed sowing schedule as a guide for sowing seeds at the right time to produce healthy plants in time to move outside. You can start onion family plants and others that grow slowly from seed now.

**Trees and Shrubs:** You can still brighten up your home by forcing branches of spring-flowering trees such as forsythia, dogwood, and crabapple. It's simple. Just cut the budded branches, place them in a bucket of warm water, and recut the stems to enhance water absorption. Then sit back and let nature take over. In a few days, the branches should begin to produce flowers.

**Lawns:** Does the thought of mowing make you cringe? Consider converting part of your lawn to a garden or a place for an alternative groundcover.

**Houseplants:** Inspect houseplants for insects. You can remove pests by hand or carefully wash them off with tepid water, if needed. Pick up and discard dead foliage that has dropped to the soil; it can form a breeding area for pests and disease. Consider discarding heavily infested plants. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

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## February 22

**Perennials:** Continue to plan your garden, using your notes, photos and other resources to evaluate areas that could use more or different plants. To keep the work manageable, prioritize areas of concern, spreading the work over a few seasons if needed. Identify plant types and varieties that would grow best under your conditions.

**Flowers:** If you'll be starting from seed slow-growing annuals like lobelia, petunia, vinca, snapdragon and verbena, start them indoors now. Check seed packets for timing and planting information. Some types may germinate irregularly: wait until germination is complete before potting them up. To ensure healthy plants, provide the bright light, an optimal moisture level and temperature for your varieties, and good air circulation.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Yearly pruning of fruit trees and grape vines may be done while the plants are dormant (between now and approximately mid-March) when the branches and stems are not frozen.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Brownd evergreen leaves and leaf tips may indicate winter wind and sun damage. Don't write them off yet. The plants may recover in spring as new growth emerges. Consider future winter protection or alternatives that can stand up better to the conditions on site.

**Lawns:** Beware of cool-season weeds including henbit, chickweed and hairy bittercress, which sprout in fall and survive winter conditions. If there are few, you can pull them up and focus on using cultural methods such as overseeding to increase the density of the lawn to crowd them out. If the lawn is full of weeds, consider renovating it in fall. This will give you time to discover cultural changes that could be made to improve the turf.

**Houseplants:** Pinch back houseplants to improve their appearance. Bulbs that have been forced can be placed in a bright window in a cool room (away from a heat source) in anticipation of blooming.

## February 29

**Perennials:** Weather permitting, carefully remove old, brown leaves of your hellebores now to expose this year's emergent flowers. Watch other semi-evergreen perennials such as Bishop's hat (*Epimedium*), coral bells (*Heuchera*), lady's mantle (*Alchemilla*), and lily turf (*Liriope*). Remove the old leaves as new growth appears but before it expands.

**Flowers:** There's still time to take cuttings of indoor plants now to use as bedding plants in the late spring, such as geranium, coleus, begonia, etc. Tuberous begonias may also be started this month. Plant in individual peat pots. Keep out of direct sun but in good light. Maintain a lightly moist soil that barely dries out but is never wet.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Resist the urge to rush the season! Wait to start most warm weather transplants. A short, stout, sturdy tomato transplant (or anything else) is better than a leggy, all-stretched-out weakling. Consult seed packets and catalogs for the best time to start your chosen varieties. Avoid tilling garden soil too early, especially if it's wet and sticky. Allow it to dry so that when you form a ball, soil crumbles easily.

**Trees and Shrubs:** Weather permitting, prune summer and fall blooming shrubs such as late blooming hydrangeas (but not spring bloomers such as azaleas and rhododendrons or you'll whack off the flower buds).

**Lawns:** Get ready for spring! Sharpen your lawnmower blade, cutting and digging tools. Local tool or hardware shops sometimes advertise blade sharpening. Ensure that power tools work well, too.

**Houseplants:** Are your houseplants dusty? The leaves of large, smooth-leaved plants such as philodendron and ficus may be gently wiped with a damp cloth and lukewarm water. Support the underside of the leaf with one hand so you don't rip or break it off. Don't use polishes (or apply any coatings) to make leaves shine because these may cause injury. Dust can be removed from fuzzy-leaved plants with a small, soft paintbrush.

**General:** Reserve your spot for the next webinar in the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester Home Gardening Lecture Series:

### *Rain Gardens*

Wednesday, Mar. 24, 2021 from 10:00 to 11:00 am, remote on Zoom

Speaker: Ann Edmonds, Master Gardener Volunteer, will show how to transform an occasionally flooded space into a beautiful landscape that can help reduce flooding, erosion and provide habitat for wildlife.

Pre-registration is required: \$5 in advance via check or money order. For information on the lecture series, check out: <http://westchester.cce.cornell.edu/> Questions? Contact CCE at [westchester@cornell.edu](mailto:westchester@cornell.edu) or call 914-285-4640.