

What to Do in the Garden in February 2024

Feb. 3-9

Perennials and Flowers: In recent years, we have seen unsettled weather in late winter where temperatures may range from a daytime high over 60°F to lows near zero at night. Perennials (and other plants) that have met their winter chilling requirement may begin to grow during an extended warm period and sustain injury to the new growth when temperatures plunge from relatively warm to sub-freezing conditions over a few hours. Lightly mulching over the top of perennials with materials such as pine boughs can help to buffer the plants and minimize injury.

Fruits and Vegetables: Check bramble fruits such as blackberries and raspberries. Loosely tie up canes that have come free of their trellis. Wait until you can see evidence of budbreak (usually around mid to late March) to remove winter-killed canes and cane tips below the injury, and to thin the stand. Red raspberries should be spaced at three to four healthy, robust canes per linear foot. Blackberries and black and purple raspberries are best thinned to two to three canes per linear foot.

Trees and Shrubs: Walk around the yard to look for winter damaged branches. Prune dead, damaged or diseased twigs and canes of shrubs. Heavy broken branches of trees and large shrubs that are loosely attached may fall, tearing bark and causing additional injuries that provide a wider opening for insects and diseases. For safety, hire an arborist to care for large trees. You may see spotted lanternfly (SLF) egg masses on trees and many landscape surfaces. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. See <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> Report sightings by sending an image to ReportSLF.com and crush as many eggs as you can find. Use a card to scrape them off of surfaces into a sealable bag, squish, and discard in trash.

Lawns: The lawn is still dormant, but take a good look around. Are there any areas that have been hard to mow where you could do something different? If you identify potential areas for change but are not sure what direction to take, record images of these spots throughout the season to see if an answer, such as planting for seasonal interest, comes into view..

Houseplants: While the heat is on indoors, the air may become very dry. Brown leaf tips are one indicator of dry air and lack of moisture. Keep plants away from radiators and heat registers. To gauge when to water, determine how long it takes for the top inch of potting mix to dry out in a given pot. Monitor the soil, and water when the potting mix is dry at a depth below this level.

General: Learn about creating a landscape garden in the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester 2024 Home Garden Lecture Series: *Landscaping and Garden Design*.

Wednesday, Feb. 28 from 10 to 11 am, remote on Zoom, \$5.

Speaker: Raj Pande, Master Gardener Volunteer with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester.

Raj will discuss the creation of landscape gardens, planning, design, site conditions, budgeting and scheduling, and examine the aesthetics of gardens as an art form, garden purpose, style, location, form, texture, color, and plant selection, with ongoing maintenance in mind. For more information, contact westchester@cornell.edu or 914-285-4620. See

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Feb. 10-16

Perennials: Take a look at stored bulbs of tuberous begonia, canna, dahlia and gladiolus. Compost any that are dried out and trash those that are rotting. Repack sound begonias, cannas and dahlias in clean peat moss or vermiculite that is just slightly moist and keep them in a cool place. Gladiolus bulbs should have full air circulation and may be packed loosely in an open crate or paper bag. The bulbs will keep best in a location that stays between 50 and 65 degrees F. Do not pack any tender bulbs more than two layers deep.

Flowers: Here's how to make a Valentine's bouquet last longer: Recut stems on an angle underwater, discarding any leaves that would be submerged. Use a packet of flower preservative in the water, and display the flowers in a cool place (optimally around 65°F) out of direct sunlight.

Fruits and Vegetables: You can start seeds indoors of slow growing leeks and onions (and celery if you'd like a challenge), for transplant in late March or early to mid-April. Follow growing directions on the seed packet or catalog. Onion "sets" are also available at garden centers and through mail orders. Purchase or schedule arrival in early spring for planting when the soil is likely to be dry enough to be worked.

Trees and Shrubs: Ensure that winter plant protection is still in place. Adjust plant stakes, fencing and windbreak materials as needed. Spotted lanternfly (SLF) egg masses may be present on trees and many landscape surfaces. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. See <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> Report sightings by sending an image to ReportSLF.com and crush as many eggs as you can find. Use a card to scrape them off of surfaces into a sealable bag, squish and discard in trash.

Houseplants: Clean leftover pots now so you can use them later when you need them. Soak the pots to loosen potting mix and mineral deposits that have adhered to surfaces, and use a stiff brush to remove the residue and any debris. Rinse thoroughly with clean water.

General: Call a gardening friend today to attend *Landscaping and Garden Design* in the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester 2024 Home Garden Lecture Series.

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Feb. 17-23

Perennials: You can still order plants now from nursery catalogs and arrange for a later delivery. Place bulbs that have been forced in a cool room (if possible, around 50°F). Put them in a bright window or under lights, away from a heat source while they are developing in anticipation of flowers. Once the bulbs flower, keeping them under cool conditions (around 65°F) will help to prolong the blossoms.

Flowers: You may start seeds of annual larkspur, calendula, snapdragons and sweet alyssum indoors or wait until the soils can be worked outdoors and plant them directly. Wait to plant poppies and other cool season flowers that don't transplant well until you can sow them directly in the garden outdoors.

Fruits and Vegetables: Observe areas in yard where the snow melts first. These are warmer microclimates, where you might plant a vegetable garden or a bed for less-hardy varieties. 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. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Trees and Shrubs: This is a good time to assess possible structural problems in trees and other woody plants. Is it possible to correct a problem with minor pruning? Small multi-stem shrubs such as ever-blooming roses, hydrangeas, and others benefit from thinning to remove old and weak growth and are forgiving of slight "mishaps." If you are not sure what to do, contact your local Cooperative Extension. Save pruning of large trees for professionals, who can inspect for hazards and remedy the situation if possible. Check for spotted lanternfly egg masses on trees and many landscape surfaces. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. See <https://westchester.cce.cornell.edu/horticulture-environment/invasive-nuisance-species/invasive-pests/spotted-lanternfly> Report sightings by sending an image to ReportSLF.com and crush as many eggs as you can find. Use a stiff card to scrape them off of surfaces into a sealable bag, squish and discard in trash.

Houseplants: Inspect houseplants for insects. Try to remove pests by hand or douse them with water. Pick up and discard dead foliage that has fallen on the soil. Contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

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Next in the series: *Winter Injury: How Dead Is It?* Wednesday, Mar. 6, 2023, from 10 to 11 am, remote on Zoom, \$5

Speaker: Hillary Jufer, Horticulture Program Manager at CCE Westchester will discuss injury to evergreen, deciduous trees and shrubs caused by cold temperatures, winter weather, animals, and deicing salts. She will emphasize problems that Westchester County residents have reported in recent years. Management options to reduce these injuries will also be addressed.

For more information, contact westchester@cornell.edu or 914-285-4620. See

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Feb. 24 – Mar. 2

Perennials: If flower buds are beginning to emerge on hellebores, cut back the old, damaged leaves to make room for new growth. Be on the lookout for glory of the snow (*Chionodoxa*) in blue, pink and white, yellow flowers of winter aconite (*Eranthis*) and white snowdrops (*Galanthus*) popping up, even in snow. More early flowers and spring will not be far behind.

Flowers: You can begin to sow seeds indoors of annuals that are slow growers, including ageratum, browallia, geranium, impatiens, lobelia, petunia, salvia and verbena. Use a sterile seed starting mix, and when seeds sprout make sure plants have adequate lighting so they'll grow stocky and not spindly. You can also use a fan to create a very gentle breeze to encourage stocky plants once the seedlings have a few sets of true leaves. Pay close attention to the seed mix evenly moist, so it does not become saturated or too dry.

Fruits and Vegetables: Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, and related cole crops take about 6 weeks to reach transplant size, so you can start these seeds indoors now. These cool weather crops are best transplanted in the garden in the spring as soon as the soil can be worked, and nighttime air temperatures are reliably above 50° F. To determine if the soil dry is enough to be is workable, gently squeeze a handful of soil into a ball. If it crumbles a bit when you open your hand it is ready to be worked.

Trees and Shrubs:

Branches of crabapple, flowering cherry, forsythia, pear, pussy willow and quince can be cut for forcing indoors. Oaks may be pruned before March to avoid an infestation of beetles that carry oak wilt. Spotted lanternfly (SLF) egg masses may be present on trees and many landscape surfaces. SLF is a major agricultural threat that can kill crops (grapes, fruit trees and others) and affect landscape plants. See <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/environment/invasive-species-exotic-pests/spotted-lanternfly/> Report sightings by sending an image to [ReportSLF.com](https://reportslf.com) and crush as many eggs as you can find. Use a card to scrape them off of surfaces into a sealable bag, squish and discard in trash.

Houseplants: Some common houseplants are poisonous to people and pets. The Cornell Department of Animal Science includes humans as one of the “commonly affected species” in their list of Plants Poisonous to Livestock. See <http://poisonousplants.ansci.cornell.edu/php/plants.php>. This list is not exhaustive: if you have any doubt about a plant, keep it out of reach of children and pets. For more information visit <https://www.poisonhelp.org/help> or contact the American Association of Poison Control Centers at [1-800-222-1222](https://www.18002221222.org)