

What to Do in December 2025

Nov. 30 to Dec. 6

Perennials: As long as the ground's not frozen, keep planting spring bulbs. Perennial mums may benefit from a loose cover of mulch after they have finished flowering as the ground begins to freeze.

Flowers: Crocus and hyacinths bloom in mid-winter if you pot the bulbs in clean pots with a well-drained potting mix now. If the bulbs are not pre-chilled, they'll need to receive a cold period (35° to 45°F) for 12 to 14 weeks to trigger flowering. Pre-chilled bulbs should be stored in a cool (55° to 65°F) protected place that will be accessible in winter. Pot up the bulbs 3 to 4 weeks before you'd like to see flowers. Keep the pots in a cool (60°F) well-lit room and resume watering during this pre-flowering period.

Fruits and Vegetables: Protect remaining kale, spinach and other cool season crops from freezing with plastic sheeting or a cold frame. Make sure the cold frame or plastic can be vented on sunny days to keep plants from heating up too much or putting on tender growth that may freeze later. Remove any remaining fallen fruit under bearing trees.

Trees and Shrubs: Once the leaves are down, clear out roof gutters. Continue to remove dead or damaged wood from trees and shrubs to minimize additional damage after winter storms. Oaks may be pruned at this time. Contact an arborist for work on large trees.

Lawns: Before putting the mower away for the season, sharpen the blade (or have this done by a professional) so this task doesn't await you in the spring. If using a gas mower, change the oil, spark plug and air filter. If using a fertilizer spreader, clean and put it away. New York State law prohibits the application of lawn fertilizer between December 1 and April 1. (Early fall is the best time to fertilize the lawn anyway.) Continue to remove sticks and other debris. Stay off frozen grass and don't allow people to park on the lawn at any time.

Houseplants: Overwatering often leads to root rot and is the biggest killer of houseplants. When watering, it's better to do this thoroughly but less frequently, based on the plants' individual needs. Allow the overflow to drain out of the bottom of the pot and wait until the top of the soil dries before watering again. If watering frequently but just enough to moisten the soil, salt deposits can build up.

General:

Here's a great holiday gift for the gardener in your life: a subscription to the Home Garden Lecture Series through Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester. There is one webinar lecture per month from January through May, and a tour in May while space lasts. Advance registration is required. The whole webinar series is \$45; individual webinars are \$5 each. Check out the brochure at https://www.canva.com/design/DAG37gykNic/RGq-kIdH95APY6-bKoGQYw/view?utm_content=DAG37gykNic&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=uniquelinks&utlId=hcc45ab7c29 For more information, please call CCE at 914-285-4640, 914-285-4620 or email westchester@cornell.edu

Dec. 7 to 13

Perennials: Seed heads of black-eyed Susan, coneflowers and native grasses and many native plants provide welcome meals for finches and other songbirds.

Flowers: Holiday poinsettia plants may last well past the holidays if exposed to bright light and cool night temperatures in the 50s or 60s. Water them well, allowing them to dry slightly between waterings without getting to the point of wilting. Protect them from drafts and direct heat sources.

Fruits and Vegetables: Check the veggie garden for surviving harvestable produce. Remove spent plants and add healthy remnants to a compost pile. Remove leaves, grass and weeds around the stems and trunks of shrubs and fruit trees to discourage damage by critters. Consider using collars constructed of hardware cloth to protect tree trunks over winter where animal pressure is high. The collars should extend at least several inches above possible snow depth and be placed a few inches into the ground. Make sure the collars are wide enough that they don't touch the surface of the trunk.

Trees and Shrubs: In areas that may receive heavy snowfall, evergreen shrubs that are small enough to reach safely and at risk of splitting under heavy snow or ice can be loosely tied. Jute or another soft biodegradable twine should be tied loosely at the base of the shrub, then gradually and loosely wrapped in a spiral upward. The twine should be wrapped tightly enough to keep the stems in place without immobilizing them. Wrapping should stop about a quarter from the top of the plant, and the end of the twine should be tied to the end of a stem. To avoid damage, snow and ice should be allowed to melt naturally, and the twine should be removed before growth starts in spring. When planting new evergreen shrubs in the future, selecting or training the plants to a single main stem will help them shed snow naturally without breakage.

Lawns: As cold weather persists and grass growth has stopped, the mower should be put away. If this has not already been done, the deck and body should be thoroughly cleaned, and the blade sharpened. Electric equipment batteries that are not rated for extreme cold should be stored in a dry place at a temperature around 40 to 50°F (with an overall safe range of approximately 32 to 104°F). Proper storage will prolong battery life, reduce environmental impact, and save money. Gas-powered equipment should be winterized by changing the oil, lubricating parts, and either draining fuel or adding a gas stabilizer to fuel tanks.

Houseplants: Aphids, mealy bugs, scale, spider mites, thrips, and whiteflies are common pests that can damage houseplants. A small infestation may be removed by hand, but heavily infested plants are often best discarded. For guidance on treatment options, contact the local Cooperative Extension.

General: To enjoy watching birds, birdfeeders should be set out if they have not already been placed. Feeders should be kept filled and cleaned regularly to maintain bird health. All visible debris should be removed, feeders scrubbed, sanitized, and dried before refilling. For more information, see <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/browse/topic/feeding-birds/bird-feeders-feeding-birds#> Birds also require a continuous source of fresh, clean water that does not freeze.

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Dec. 14 to 20

Perennials: Many native plants and other perennial seeds can be planted outdoors in winter without special equipment. Numerous hardy species require a cold period to break dormancy for germination. A simple method involves using vented recycled milk or other beverage containers filled with potting mix, where seeds are planted and watered. When placed outdoors, these containers protect seeds from animals and harsh weather while promoting germination in spring. Containers should be checked occasionally and watered, if necessary, but hardening off tender seedlings will not be required. For more information, contact the local Cooperative Extension.

Flowers: Winter interest can be added to outdoor containers by including evergreen and holly boughs. If excess materials from holiday decorations are not being used, refer to the “Trees and Shrubs” section below.

Fruits and Vegetables: Leeks and other protected winter vegetables can continue to be harvested. With fruit trees now bare, their form should be assessed. Dead branches should be removed, and weak, crossing, or otherwise unproductive shoots can be marked with surveyor’s tape or other soft material for removal in spring. For guidance on pruning refer to Cornell Guide to Growing Fruit at Home here: <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/60165302-b299-433a-952d-9ac82cc63849/content> or contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Trees and Shrubs: Small trimmings of holly and other evergreens can be used to make garlands or as filler for flower arrangements. Corrective pruning should be reserved for spring when growth resumes.

Lawns: Keep cars and foot traffic off of frozen grass.

Houseplants: If houseplants appear dusty, they should be cleaned. Many foliage plants can be rinsed in the sink or shower when they need watering, ensuring containers drain thoroughly. Plants with fuzzy leaves, as well as cacti and succulents that thrive in drier conditions, should be cleaned using a soft brush.

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Dec. 21 to 27

Perennials: Photos and garden notes should be reviewed to begin planning next year’s perennial beds.

Flowers: To prevent dried flowers and seed heads on wreaths and arrangements from deteriorating, they can be sprayed with a fixative or hairspray. This process can be messy, so any work surface should be covered for protection.

Fruits and Vegetables: Homemade soup during the holidays is especially satisfying when prepared with favorite recipes and homegrown produce and herbs. This is an ideal time to consider adding new types of herbs and vegetables to the garden to expand next year’s options.

Trees and Shrubs: Small trimmings of holly and other evergreens can be used to make garlands or as filler for flower arrangements. Corrective pruning should be reserved for spring when growth resumes.

Lawns: Mowing should be finished, and lawns cleared of leaves and other debris. With these tasks finished, it’s time for a well-earned break. Enjoy the holiday season!

Houseplants: Tepid water should be used when watering houseplants, as ice-cold water can shock them. Plants should be moved away from cold drafts and heaters.

Dec. 28 to Jan. 3

Perennials: If a cut evergreen tree or pin boughs were used for holiday decorations, the branches can be laid over perennials planted this season after the holidays. This helps protect them from damaging freeze and thaw cycles. Garden catalogs can be reviewed for ideas on new varieties to plant in spring, and ordering ahead ensures the best selection.

Flowers: Creativity can be expressed through floral arrangements by using vessels to hold interesting branches, dried grasses, and herbs alone or mixed with flowers.

Fruits and Vegetables: Usable produce can continue to be harvested. Blueberries provide healthy, delicious fruit in season and ornamental interest throughout the year. For those considering growing this native crop, planning should begin now. Site conditions should be assessed to select the best location for the shrubs, a protected, sunny spot throughout the growing season with well-drained soil and plenty of organic matter (or compost added if needed). Unless the soil is already strongly acidic, adjusting the pH may take a season or more and could be an ongoing task. Raised beds offer an alternative, allowing the addition of a suitable soil mix and providing a frame that can support a temporary netted enclosure to protect ripe fruit from birds. For more information, see the [Cornell Guide to Growing Fruit at Home](https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/60165302-b299-433a-952d-9ac82cc63849/content) at <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/60165302-b299-433a-952d-9ac82cc63849/content> or contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Trees and Shrubs: Leaves, grass, and weeds should be kept clear around shrubs, fruit trees, and young trees to discourage mice, voles, and other pests. After the soil has frozen, mulch can be replenished if needed, up to a depth of 2 inches, while keeping it away from tree trunks and shrub bases. This helps protect newly planted and shallow-rooted shrubs from winter damage. Shredded oak leaves, pine needles, or bark nuggets are effective mulch options.

Lawns: Continue to pick up loose twigs and branches.

Houseplants: Move plants away from chilly windows on frosty nights. Keep houseplants away from cold drafts and the hot dry air given off by heaters.

General: Is there a new plant or gardening technique you'd like to try next year? This is a good time to research plant requirements and best management practices from your local Cooperative Extension, Cornell and other local and regional evidence based university sources. See <http://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/>

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