

Nov./Dec. 2016 Newsletter

The most noteworthy thing about gardeners is that they are always optimistic, always enterprising, and never satisfied. They always look forward to doing something better than they have ever done before.

- Vita Sackville-West, 1892 - 1962



From the President's Pen

Where has the year gone? It seemed like the other day that we were taking a break for the summer and we were having our summer social. Today we come together to share a meal and finish up our business at our 2016 Annual General Meeting.

Although, I will be stepping down as your President, I am really keen on taking on the responsibilities of Past President. Before I leave though, I would like to thank my Executive for their devotion and support throughout this year. This Society works because there are a lot of dedicated volunteers who give of their time and talents to take on a variety of tasks. We worked as a team to complete such events as Seedy Sunday, the Junior Gardener program, working in our community gardens, publishing our newsletters, pro-

ducing our yearbook, maintaining and updating our website, setting up our flower shows, and decorating our Christmas tree at the Crystal Palace. We hosted the Flower and Edible show in August 2016 and we had it recognized as a sanctioned event for the 200th Anniversary of Perth as a Military Settlement. I would also like to thank each and every one of you for your friendship and understanding as I undertook the responsibilities of your President. I am honoured to work on your behalf throughout the past two years. I have learned a lot and I feel richer for the experience.

Lastly, I would like to wish all of you, health and happiness for the coming year. My warmest regards to you and your families.

Jane Law



Houseplant Advice

By Larry Hodgson

In winter, don't let your houseplants touch the window. By all means, place your houseplants near a sunny window in the winter: just don't let them touch the

glass.

When days become shorter in the fall and winter and the weather turns grayer and grayer, it makes sense to move your indoor plants as close as possible to your home's windows so that they can get the best light pos-



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sible. However, they shouldn't be so close they actually touch the glass. Even with insulated glass, enough cold seeps through on a truly cold winter night to damage or even kill any leaves or other plant parts that actually touch the window.

You don't have to move them far back, though. Air is a fairly poor transmitter of cold, so just a 1-inch (2.5 cm) space between the glass and the plants will keep them from harm.

Perth Festival of Lights

This much loved event is held on the first Friday in December each year. The public is invited on 6 p.m. on Friday, Dec 2 as the Crystal Palace is opened for visitors to see the 35 uniquely decorated Christmas trees, sponsored by our local businesses (PDHS also decorates a tree). There will be great food to warm your tummy, a roaring bonfire, music and spectacular fireworks sponsored by the Town of Perth.

Make Your Own Holiday Decorations

*Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor
University of Vermont*

Natural holiday decorations such as roping, swags, wreaths, and table arrangements are not hard to make. You will catch on to the simple principles quickly, and in a short time your results may surprise everyone, including yourself. You can be proud of the decorations you made, giving your home a truly festive spirit and even involving various family or friends too.

Most of the materials you need are inexpensive, or free for the asking in many locales. But remember to get permission before cutting branches or fruits on someone else's land! Your local florist also should have natural materials, both local and from warmer climates. Tree farms are a good source of greenery, or even undecorated products you can then decorate yourself. Check local newspapers for such farms, or check online.

For plant materials, evergreen twigs and boughs are the most important. You may be surprised at how much material goes into even small decorations. If you have a cool, moist spot free of drafts for storage, you can start gathering greens as early as late November. For longest

life, keep them away from heat, wind, and sun.

The most common evergreens include balsam fir (the most common), spruce (needles don't last as long as fir and are prickly), white pine, and hemlock (needles will drop in dry air). Other less commonly used evergreens are white cedar or arborvitae (foliage fades to yellow in a few weeks), red cedar and other wild junipers (sharp needles, so use sparingly to add variety, color, texture, and form), and broad-leaved evergreens like rhododendrons. One caution about using yew (or taxus) is that all plant parts are poisonous, especially the attractive seeds. Look for a few branches of yellow-leaved evergreens for some color, such as certain variegated yews, gold-thread false cypress, old-gold juniper, or one of the gold arborvitae.

Other plant parts you can use for interest, and to give arrangements a New England "country" appearance include cones, grasses, pods, and berries. The latter can be found in many colors. For red or orange, try winterberry, sumac, crabapples, hawthorn, and mountain ash. For a touch of blue, use nannyberry, arrowwood, or junipers, and for yellow, crabapples. Florist shops may carry more exotic plant parts such as lotus pods (which can be sprayed colors), holly (both for berries and leaves), mistletoe, and various greens (such as boxwood or western cedar).

Some people like to add artificial decorations like bells, balls, and fake berries to their natural arrangements. Red ribbons also are popular, although hundreds of other styles and color combinations of ribbons are available. If using outdoors, make sure you select a ribbon rated for that use. Keep the width in proportion to the size of the arrangement.

In addition to plants and other decorative materials, you will need something for a base for most decorations if starting from scratch. Wreaths require a wire, foam, or straw wreath form or a coat hanger bent into a circle. Rope or thick, coarse twine makes a good base for garlands or roping. Florist foam, which comes in "bricks" that can be cut to fit any container, may be purchased at florist or craft shops.

Other essentials include a pair of clippers or utility scissors, florist picks (to hold greens to straw bases), and florist wire. The latter is a thin green wire, available in several widths, that is used to hold everything together, such as cones to wreaths, greens to frames or rope, and decorations to walls.

The range of decorations you can make reach-

es far beyond what you may think is possible. Arrangements for sale in florist shops may give you ideas, as can browsing through holiday magazines and online sites. So, don't hesitate to try out new ideas. Just keep in mind that whatever you make should be in proportion to, and harmonize with, the surroundings.

To make wreaths or ropings, you will need individual branchlets or bundles of them. Simply cut small branch pieces four to six inches in length from main branches, and wire or pin them directly to the frames. Or you can wire several together into a bundle, then wire the bundle to the base.

Overlap one branchlet or bundle over the cut ends of the last to hide them and the wire or rope base. Proceed down the rope or around the frame in this manner. Finally, once the greens are secured, add a bow and a few ornaments of interest, such as cones, berries, or artificial decorations.

To make a table arrangement, start with a wet block of florist foam, either free standing or cut to fit a basket or other decorative container. Use a saucer under the wet foam, unless the container is water tight. Place sprigs of green in the foam, followed by natural ornaments such as berries and artificial ornaments. Berries can be wired to a florist pick, then stuck in the foam. Follow the same design principles as you would if arranging flowers.

A door swag is simple. Take several branches of a desired length, usually 2 feet or so, and tie together to hang upside down. Then tie a shorter branch or two on top, upright. Where these all tie together, place a bow, group of cones, or other ornamentation.

If you want to use candles, use decorative lanterns to keep candles away from the greens (which, when dry, can be quite flammable), then decorate around these with greenery and color. Get a mold for making a luminary of ice, and place greens and berries in the water before freezing. These, with a candle inside, make an elegant table decoration for a special dinner.

If you have a stairway and banister, hang a grouping or two of greens and berries from the upright supports. Create a winter or holiday scene in a terrarium, glass bowl, or empty fish tank. Make a fairy garden with a holiday theme. Fill a wooden bowl or basket with an assortment of cones and nuts, perhaps with some bright balls for color.

If you have large containers that remain out-

side over winter, such as whisky barrel halves or even a raised bed near a walk or porch, decorate these too. If you can do so prior to the soil freezing solid, insert branches of greenery, red-twig dogwood branches, or glittery decorations available from craft and home supply stores. If the soil in these has frozen, you may need to get out a power drill to make the holes, as I've had to do some years!

Many other decorations are possible using wire or Styrofoam bases in the shapes of candy canes, cones, or balls, among others. You'll find these online or at local craft stores. Simply follow the above procedures and your own creativity!

Preparing Garden Tools for Winter

By Dale Odorizzi

As the days of working outside in your garden draw to a close, it is time to put away your garden tools properly for the winter. Doing so can add years to the life of your garden equipment. Your tools will be protected from rust and wear and they will be ready to go the moment spring fever hits next year.

Scrape any excess mud or dirt from the tool. You can use a stick to knock off large pieces and a wire brush for tougher spots. If soil is really caked on, you may need to leave the tool soaking in a bucket of water for a few minutes before moving on to the next step. Wipe the tool off with an old rag and let it dry thoroughly.

Once it has dried, remove any rust by rubbing it vigorously with a small piece of steel wool. Be sure to wear gloves for this step. After removing all rust, sharpen the tool, if it has a sharp edge. This includes shovels, edgers and pruners.

Condition wooden handles by sanding any rough or splintery portions with sandpaper. You can rub the wooden handles with Linseed Oil. Be careful with how you dispose of your rags after doing this as Linseed Oil can be very flammable.

Spray metal parts with penetrating lubricating oil to protect them from rust. Another approach to lubricating your tools is to fill a bucket or container with clean sand. Mix in a litre of cooking oil. You can use used cooking oil. Plunge the metal part of your tools into the sand 2 or 3 times. Some people leave their tools in this bucket of sand. If you read about using sand and oil, you may find that older sources tell

you to use motor oil. Motor oil is now treated much more carefully and should not be used for this. You can also use your sand/oil bucket throughout the growing season to keep your tools well lubricated. The oil lubricates the tool and when you wash it off after using, all the dirt and muck simply slides off.

Store your tools in a dry spot. Avoid leaving tools on the floor of your garage or any other places likely to get damp in winter.

Heating Birdbaths And Other Winter Gardening Tips

*Leonard Perry, UVM Horticulturist
and Charlie Nardozzi, Garden Consultant*

Providing birds with water by means of heated birdbaths, starting herbs indoors, and choosing the best poinsettias are some of the gardening activities for this month.

Keep bird baths ice-free and filled with fresh water. Heated bird baths, and heating elements made to insert into bird baths to keep them from freezing, are available at many garden supply stores and online. Make sure if using such electrical devices that they are plugged into properly grounded outlets using safe, outdoor extension cords.

To encourage birds to visit your garden this winter, set out feeders near evergreen trees or shrubs so birds have cover while they feed. If you or your neighbors have bird-chasing cats, or if raiding squirrels are a problem, hang the feeders higher off the ground and away from trees and structures. Spend a few dollars more on high quality bird seeds, such as black oil sunflower, to appeal to the most birds and give them the nutrition they need.

Start seeds of basil, chives, sage, or other herbs for a winter windowsill herb garden. If you don't have a sunny windowsill, consider setting up a light garden using fluorescent bulbs suspended a few inches above the tops of plants.

As nights grow colder, make sure houseplants are away from window glass to prevent chill damage. Or close shades and curtains at night to help insulate them against the cold.

When shopping for poinsettias, look for ones with healthy green leaves all the way to the bottom of the plants. For longest life, choose a plant with the flowers not yet open--these are the rather inconspicuous yellow lumps at the center of the brightly colored bracts (actually these colored parts are modified leaves). Visit a greenhouse to be awed by masses in bloom, and to find some of the latest varieties such as with marbled or spotted bracts. Make sure to keep the plant covered and out of cold on the way home, and away from drafts once home, as poinsettias are quite sensitive to cold.

If friends or others in your family garden, think about shopping for holiday gifts at a garden supply store or even hardware or home store. New hand tools, good pruners, gloves, weather instruments, and garden magazine subscriptions are some of the many items you might consider as gifts. If not sure what to get or what they have, then gift certificates are always welcome. If money is tight, consider a gift certificate of your own time this coming year to help with mowing, planting, weeding, building a raised bed, or other activity.

Other activities for this month including cutting your own Christmas tree at a local grower, if such trees are part of your tradition, and checking houseplants for pests weekly.

(Charlie Nardozzi is a nationally known horticulturist, author, gardening consultant, and garden coach; gardeningwithcharlie.com).