January Garden Guide

* When using salt to melt ice on walks and driveways, spread it carefully to avoid damage to nearby shrubs. Consider using sand or sawdust instead.

* Brush snow from evergreens as soon as possible after a storm. Use a broom in an upward, sweeping motion. Serious damage may be caused by heavy snow or ice accumulating on the branches.

* When pruning large limbs, always undercut first. This means to cut from the bottom up, one-third of the way through the limb, then finish by cutting from the top. The undercut keeps the limb from splitting and breaking off, which could damage the trunk and become an entryway for insects and diseases. Do not cut flush to the trunk, the collar or enlarged base of a branch produces hormones that help heal wounds.

* For easier lawn maintenance, eliminate the hard to mow spaces. Eliminate acute angles in beds and borders. Combine single trees or shrubs into a large planting connected with ground cover. Put the bird bath in a flower bed or surround it with ground cover.

* Avoid heavy traffic on the dormant lawn. Dry grass is easily broken and the crown of the plant may be severely damaged or killed.

* Review your vegetable garden plans. Perhaps a smaller garden with fewer weeds and insects will give you more produce.

* When reviewing your garden catalogs for new vegetable varieties to try, an important consideration is improved insect and/or disease resistance. Watch also for drought-tolerant types.

* Analyze last year's planting, fertilizing and spraying records. Make notes to reorder successful varieties as well as those you wish to try again.

* Check stored fruits and vegetables such as potatoes and apples for bad spots which may lead to decay. Remove and use those which show signs of spoiling. Separate others into slotted trays or bins to increase air circulation and reduce decay possibilities.

* To prolong bloom, protect poinsettias from drafts and keep them moderately moist.

* Turn and prune house plants regularly to keep them shapely. Pinch back new growth to promote bushy plants.

* Check all house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine that they are not harboring any pests.

* House plants and holiday gift plants should not be placed on top of the television. This location is too warm and in most homes too far from windows to provide adequate light.

* During the winter most houses are too dry for house plants. Humidity may be increased by placing plants on trays lined with pebbles and filled with water to within one half inch of the base of the pot. If you heat with wood, keep a pot of water on the stove. The added moisture will be healthier for you as well as your plants.

* House plants with large leaves and smooth foliage, such as philodendrons, dracaena and rubber plant benefit if their leaves are washed at intervals to remove dust and grime, helping keep the leaf pores open.

* To clean crusty clay pots, add one cup each of white vinegar and household bleach to a gallon of warm water and soak the pots. For heavily crusted pots, scrub with a steel wool pad after soaking for 12 hours.

* If you have some time this winter, paint the handles of garden tools red or orange. This will preserve the wood and make the tools easier to locate next summer when you lay them down in the garden or on the lawn.

* Move garden ornaments such as urns or jars into the garage or basement to prevent damage during the cold winter season. If containers are too large to move, cover them to prevent water collecting in them or turn them upside down during the winter so water will not collect and freeze in them causing breakage.

* Add garden record keeping to the list of New Year's resolutions. Make a note of which varieties of flowers and vegetables do best and which do poorly in your garden.

* Feed the birds regularly and see that they have water. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts, and bread crumbs as well as bird seed.

* Do not wait until late in the winter to order seeds. Many varieties sell out early.