

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

December Gardening Ain't for Sissies

The kind of weather this past week really puts gardeners to the test. The “sissy” types usually just hang it up and become couch potatoes...they probably aren't that serious about it, anyway. The rest of us just recognize this time as that opportune-time when we do all the maintenance required to continue to be happy gardeners and/or catch up on the reading the gardening magazines and books.

For example, if you haven't cleaned out those beds from all the stuff that froze last week, now is the time to “git ‘er done.” But be sure to dress for the weather; that is, dress in layers so that you can peel them off as the temperature and your efforts warrant. Clean out all the dead plant tops and put it all in the compost pile or bin. Put down mulch to protect the roots, conserve moisture, prevent weeds from germinating and conserve heat.

This is also a great time to do the required maintenance on all the tools that you may have used this past year. Sharpen and oil the pruning shears, the hoes, the shovels, the tiller tines, the weed choppers, cultivators, etc. Change the oil in the lawnmower and sharpen the blade.

If you have poinsettias in the house and they're looking really good, you're gonna wanna keep them that way until you're finished with them later. It's very important to water them just a little to keep the soil moist but not too wet. If you have poinsettias in 6-8 inch pots, just put about 4-6 ice cubes in the pot each day; larger pots require more ice cubes. As they melt, they'll provide just enough moisture to keep the plants in pristine shape and it's so easy. You just gotta remember to do it every day. Of course, if you have a whole house full of poinsettias, that's gonna be a lotta ice cubes. You may wanna consider getting one of those little ¼-inch hoses that connects to the sink faucet and water them that way. Just keep the soil moist. Be sure to keep the plants in the brightest light you have in the house. Remember, too, that these plants started being used as Christmas plants because they were readily available as weeds in Mexico. In other words, they're still weeds that just happen to be pretty weeds. So don't plan on trying to keep them alive until next Christmas. It really isn't worth all the effort it takes. Yeah, you can keep them alive, but it's pretty hard to get them to “bloom” again next year...everything has to be just right and it's more trouble than it's worth in my opinion. Oh, and by the way, the plants are NOT poisonous. The person who started that rumor admitted that he made a mistake years ago.

There's still time to plant pansies if you have them and don't have them in the ground yet. They don't do much through the winter, but do especially well early next spring. You can still plant hardy trees and shrubs this month as long as you keep the soil moist during the winter (key word here is ‘hardy’).

If you have some trees with dead wood in them, now is a good time to remove that, also. Just don't prune any of the live branches at this time. A new blush of bloom could spell disaster with the next freeze. And please don't prune the crape myrtles. They don't need it...especially now.

If you have fall veggies growing, be sure to keep the soil moist through the winter. It doesn't have to be much, just moist.

You can still draw a variety of birds to your feeders, so keep them full. Just remember that once you start you have to keep it up. They also need water and you're likely to draw even more birds if you provide a birdbath this winter.

This is also a good time to get around to planning those new beds you've been talking about. Lay them out on paper and go through the catalogues to pick out which plants go where. If you have the time, equipment, and inclination, go ahead and till the beds and add compost to them now.

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