

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

More January Catch-up Stuff

Go ahead and take down the purple martin house, clean it out, make any needed repairs, disinfect it with a 10 percent bleach solution, RINSE it really well and leave it open so that it dries out really, really well. The scouts will be showing up about the middle of next month and you don't wanna have to hurry the job.

There are still a few hummers around, so if you have hummingbird feeders up, be sure to keep the sugar water changed frequently—four parts water to one part sugar. No coloring is needed.

Continue to care for your pansies, bluebonnets, snapdragons, spring bulbs, dianthus, calendulas and other winter annuals. Don't over-water bluebonnets. There is still time to transplant pansies, dianthus, stock, calendulas and other cool-season annual flowers. Protect small plants against severe cold until they are well established. Side-dress flowering plants with slow-release lawn fertilizer if you haven't fertilized in the last six weeks. Use one cup of lawn fertilizer per 100 square feet.

Use water-soluble fertilizers or hibiscus food for bougainvilleas and other plants that are actively growing in the greenhouse. Bougainvilleas will bloom all winter if they are in a greenhouse. Keep watering and fertilizing. Many tulips, daffodils, and other spring bulbs emerge and bloom this month. They benefit from nitrogen fertilization at the rate of two cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed.

Apply dormant oil to control scale and other insects on fruit trees. Wait until the temperature will be at least 45°F for two days following application. Be sure to follow the instructions on the label.

January is the second best month to prune trees...February is best. Don't prune blooms on early-blooming plants like Indian hawthorn, mountain laurel, flowering peach, ornamental cherry, climbing roses, althea, etc. Wait until after bloom is complete

Bare-root and containerized fruit trees, blackberries and grapes should be selected and planted as soon as possible so they will be well established before spring growth begins. The selection of recommended varieties of fruit and nut trees is critical for long-term success.

Keep your living Christmas tree well watered (once per week) during the establishment period (2-3 months.)

If you don't receive an inch of rain, water the St. Augustine lawn,—1/2 inch every 2-3 weeks is enough. Buffalo, zoysia and bermuda grasses are dormant—don't water them.

It's a good time to aerate with the plug-cutter type and then top dress with a half-inch of compost.

Don't fertilize or use weed-and-feed products. If there is weed growth, mow every 3-4 weeks.

Gradually build up low spots in the lawn with 1/2-1 inch of compost or top-dressing. Be sure the leaves of the grass stick through the compost so as not to smother the grass.

Service the lawn mower by sharpening the blade, change the spark plug, change the oil, and drain old gasoline and dispose of it properly.

On Monday, January 31, the GVST "Essentials of Gardening" series of classes begin. They're 2-hour classes on all kinds of gardening topics and are taught by experts from the local area (including—ahem—yours truly.) This year, the classes will be held from noon to 3:00 pm every two weeks up until about the middle of April. All they ask is a \$5 donation each class to cover the cost of materials. I'll be hosting the whole shooting match at the Garden Center on Funston in the city. C'mon by.

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to gardener@gvtc.com