

# Winter in your garden

JUST BECAUSE EVERYTHING'S COVERED IN SNOW and it's really, really cold out there doesn't mean you can forget about gardening until April. No, there's always something to do in the garden even in the depths of winter. Here are some ideas:

Build up of snow and ice can damage trees and shrubs. When snow piles up on evergreens, try to gently brush it off. Don't shake the branches as this may cause them to break. If the snow is frozen on the branch and will not brush off easily, it is best to let it melt naturally, to avoid damage to the tree or shrub. If tree limbs break due to the weight of ice or snow, it is advisable to have the broken limbs removed as soon as the weather permits. Hanging branches can be a danger to passing pedestrians. Also, the tree will be able to heal the wound better in spring if the wound has clean edges instead of ragged tears.

Talking of trees and shrubs, winter is the best time to prune many varieties. For example, fruit trees and ornamentals such as flowering crabs should be pruned now. The bonus here is that it's easy to see the shape of the tree when there are no leaves to get in the way. But don't prune "sappy" trees such as maples and birches now or they'll bleed excessively. Wait until late summer to give them a haircut.

Sometimes in the middle of winter, we suddenly get a few warm days (we could use a few about now!). For the most part, this is not a big problem, but you may need to check on a couple of things. If you covered your roses with rose cones, you may need to ventilate the cone to prevent heat from building up inside. The same should be done with cold frames. If it is a warm, sunny day, the temperatures may be rising in the cold frame more than you expect. Remember to close vents as the temperature drops again at night.

Turning to the indoor environment, we need to keep our Christmas plants fresh and blooming. Most of the blooming plants prefer to be in a cool room. This keeps the plant in flower longer. Most holiday plants also need a bright room (some do well with direct sun, others do not). Keep these plants out of drafts to keep them in good health. See last month's newsletter for details on how to keep your poinsettias growing on.

It is very common to find insects meandering around the house in winter. All kinds of critters come into the house looking for a place to rest for the winter. Common nuisance pests are box elder bugs, houseflies, white flies, squash bugs, Asian ladybeetles and even aphids. As you encounter nuisance insects, just vacuum them up. Avoid smashing them as some leave stains or odors when smashed.

Don't store firewood in the house. Insects can come in with firewood. Leave the wood outside until you are ready to build a fire. Firewood should never be treated with insecticides and insecticides are not needed for most home invaders.

And now that you're back in the warm, sit down and take a look at those gorgeous seed catalogues. It's time to get your orders in. Ordering your seeds early helps ensure that you get the seeds you want – and that you have them in time to start them indoors if that's your plan.