



January

February

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

November

December

Although early, this is the time to start thinking about garden designs, and new plantings and installations for the spring. Send away for bulb and seed catalogs, pull gardening books off the shelf, grab a sketch pad and a set of colored pencils, and have at it! As conditions permit, cut away dead flower stalks, and remove clutter and debris missed in your fall cleanup.

Once you've determined new additions to your garden, and appropriate designs, consider the idea of starting plant seedlings indoors. Minimal equipment is needed. Potting soil (or another growing medium), and proper grow lights are essential. Correct technique is also essential. Consult gardening books for proper procedures for cultivation which undoubtedly will include tips on lighting, temperature control, and moisture. Start a journal to detail all gardening activities for the year.

Now is the time for smart gardeners to check equipment that may be in constant use for several months to come. Locate and clean shovels and trowels, and also sharpen pruning shears and clippers. If available, it might be wise to buy (and temporarily store) garden soil, fertilizer, and soil amendments. Check your garden's early flowering bulbs like hyacinths. Also check on early-flowering shrubs like viburnums, and vines like wisteria. These may need constant vigilance until all danger of frost is past. If left unprotected once budding begins, the flowers may be completely destroyed by severe frost.

Resist the temptation to plant too early, or even begin to prepare the soil for planting. The soil should not be a soggy mess when beginning your work in these two areas; also, there's still the factor of suitable planting temperatures to consider. Good gardeners are aware to back off from the idea of planting whenever temperatures—either in the fall or early spring—may fall low enough for the ground itself to freeze. For gardening activity at this time, you may want to confine yourself to evaluating existing plants, and decide what to keep, care for and protect, and what plants to root out and toss away. For a more "hands on" type of activity, consider cutting down dried ornamental grasses you've permitted to remain, and repotting any seedlings you've cultivated indoors with the thought of transferring them to the garden this spring.

This is probably the most popular spring month to begin planting. Out of an abundance of caution, some people follow an old "rule" to wait until after Mother's Day to plant, but unless you're faced with an unusually cold month, you're probably safe to begin two or three weeks earlier. Mulching and fertilizing (if not already done) should begin earlier in the month. Also, in order to support flowering bulbs and budding shrubs, prepare to stake plants that have heavy blossoms like hyacinths and peonies, or stake tall and rather thinly-stocked plants like lilies, delphinium, foxglove, and the like. You should monitor the progress of flowering shrubs. Some, like viburnums, will need to be pruned and shaped after flowering ceases. Do not wait until later than this occurrence. If pruned and shaped when the new buds are setting, the shrub will not flower in the following spring.

If planting now to have garden displays through the current year, you should choose perennials that will bloom in midsummer, in late summer, and in the fall. Consider planting annuals for perpetual displays this growing season. They can be interspersed with perennials, or displayed alone in containers. Daylily stems should be cut back after flowering to encourage new growth. If you're planting and gardening with the aim of benefiting the local environment, then strongly consider using native species—particularly those plants that are well-known to attract bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Many of these—such as milkweed, goldenrod, and asters are quite attractive, hardy, and readily available.

Try to avoid planting or transplanting things if possible. The summer heat may be too great a trial for plants that are trying to settle their roots and get water. In order to help retain water and provide nutrients to existing plants, they can be thinly mulched. If you're absolutely compelled to plant during this month or during the heat of August, then daily monitor whatever you plant. Proper watering, along with the possible need to periodically shade your newly introduced plants, will be of concern.

For gardening activities this month, consider clearing away dead material, and pinching off dried flowers to promote new growth. Do not, however, remove large seed-heads that will attract goldfinches, black-capped chickadees, and other seed-eating birds. The presence of these birds will enhance both the beauty and usefulness of the garden. Also, the once green but now brown and dried leaves of flowering plants—such as hyacinths—can be removed. Be sure to mark the space where roots or bulbs lie. This will reduce your risk of accidentally disturbing them during future mulching or digging.

This is an ideal month in which to plant perennials and shrubs that will either grace your garden with winter interest (depending on your selection) or will gloriously bloom next spring or summer. Plants will have relatively mild weather in which to settle their roots and become acclimated to their new "digs." Remember to water well. Weeds can be purged from garden, but exercise care not to allow seeds to fall and insure a weed's survival through its progeny. Lawns can also be trimmed a final time for the year.

Considering raking dead leaves to use as mulch, but don't permit leaves to settle and mat on grassy areas and lawns. Once compressed, they may cause grass to rot and lawns to look patchy. Container plants that you wish to overwinter outdoors should be placed in the ground—container and all. Do this before the ground freezes. Never forget at any month (or at any time of day) to simply stand in your garden and adore the beauty it presents. Even in the imperfect, joy can be found.

Heavy layers of mulch can be applied over perennials to retain water, provide nutrients, and prevent soil compaction during winter months. Consider also cutting away extraneous but otherwise attractive dried material to use in seasonal indoor displays. There's always the beauty of Indian Summer that makes such late-season work (no matter how menial) a pleasure.

Hopefully you've kept a garden journal through the year. Now is a good time to review and update it. Close it with more than technical notes. Be sure it contains heartfelt impressions of your labor, and your observations of the unseen hand of Nature that worked miracles of beauty in your garden. Select an item, a photo, or a memory to present as a gift to another.