

Gardening Notes for January

January always begins with the festivities of the Holiday Season, but reality soon returns as gardeners are looking at short and often cloudy days, cold temperatures and a sleeping garden. Looking on the positive side, we now have the leisure of working in the Garden when the time or the weather suits our schedule, since it is a time when the garden is in suspended animation so to speak. Continue taking notes in your journals on the temperatures, snowfall or rain amounts along with the sightings of visiting birds, all while enjoying your favorite winter beverage by a warm glow of a lamp.

Things to do:

Vegetables

- Plan your vegetable and annual gardens! As seed catalogues continue to appear almost daily in the mailbox, keep your designs handy so you do not buy more seed than is needed.
- As you plan your garden, don't forget to rotate your crop families. For example, try to avoid planting peppers this year where the tomatoes were last season, since they are both in the same family!
- Order your seeds early, as gardening is once again promising to be popular this year and certain varieties will sell out quickly!
- If this is the first time you are planning on creating a vegetable garden, think small to start. A 10'x12' or similar sized area is perfect for a start. Also consider starting with easy vegetables, such as Zucchini, Bush Beans, Beets or Lettuce. Tomatoes are great but are best when staked, so make certain you also have staking materials. As a reminder, tomatoes can grow to 6' tall, so it is important to plant a leafy crop like lettuce on the North side of tomatoes that will tolerate partial shade or simply place the tomatoes to the Northern end of the garden.
- Resist the urge to order too many of those vegetables that yield heavy amount of fruits. Three or four tomato plants is often all that is needed for a family of 4!

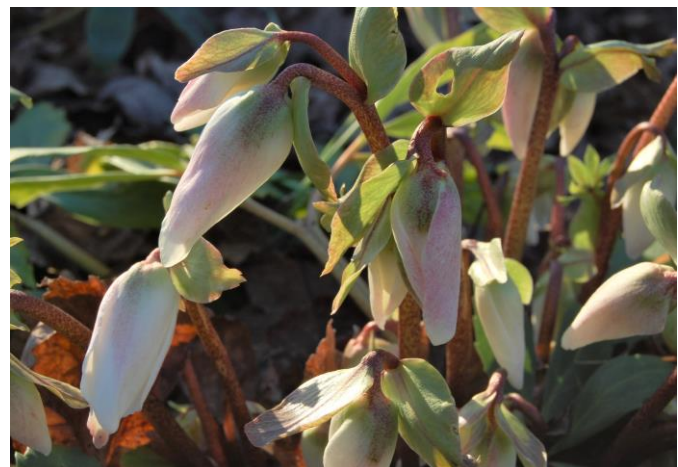
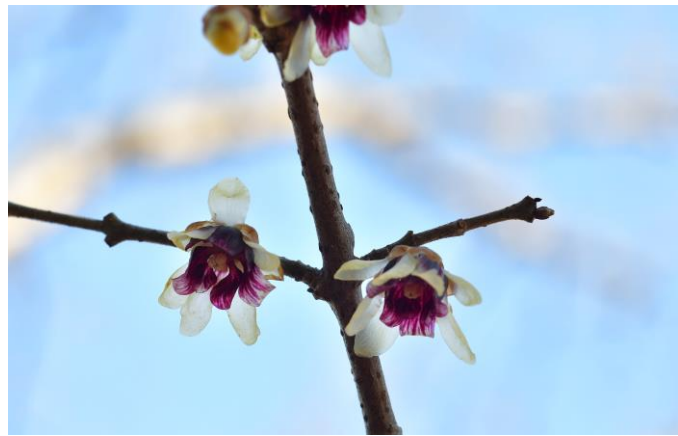
Garden

- Reread your journal from the past year. Take note of some of the major problems you encountered in 2021 (or even 2020) that can be resolved in 2022. Some of these problems may have included starting seed too early or planting vegetable plants too closely together.
- Study the winter bones of the garden. During the calm of winter, give thought to improvements that can be made for a more colorful winter garden, such as the addition of colorful stems with Red Stemmed Dogwoods or Willows, the



blooms of Winter Witch Hazels such as ‘Jelena’ pictured at right, views that need to be screened or new views that should be opened up!

- Take care of your tools! Sharpen, clean, oil and otherwise repair saws and pruners. Sharpen the cutting edge of spades and lawnmower blades, repair the handles of shovels and wheelbarrows or any other tool placed on the ‘to be fixed’ pile. Compose a list of tools to purchase that are beyond repair.
- Start to evaluate pruning needs. Typically, most pruning is completed in January through late March, with the heaviest pruning reserved for late February and early March. January is the time to evaluate plants for heavy cuts, and to begin structural work, shaping and thinning of small trees and shrubs. All rubbing branches (as seen at right) or potentially rubbing branches should be removed as well as any necessary shaping. All suckers (vigorous shoots originating from the roots) should be removed and water sprouts (vigorous shoots originating from branches) should be thinned rather than removed entirely.
- Study your shade trees for potential problems as well. This is a great time to hire a tree service to tend to these problems and the woodchips produced from the trimmed branches makes for a great mulch or a surface for woodland paths.
- Cut some branches of winter blooming Witch hazels (*Hamamelis* hybrids), Winter Sweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) as seen at right, Winter Jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) or Flowering Apricot (*Prunus mume*) to force and enjoy indoors.



- If snow is absent, start cutting back Hellebore Hybrids (*Helleborus x hybridus*) towards the end of January. It is easier to remove the foliage when the buds are not present and the foliage often turns brown by bloom time. The foliage of *Helleborus niger* 'Joseph Lemper' (photo at right) often remains green throughout the winter and nicely compliments the flowers.
- For those coalescent Hellebores that bloom on the stems of the previous year such as *Helleborus foetidus* do not cut back the foliage, as you will be removing the flower buds as well.
- If your Hellebores have started to break bud early, consider laying evergreen boughs of pine or even the boughs from the Christmas tree on these plants, providing protection during cold days.
- Remove last year's foliage of Cut Leaf Japanese Maples (*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum*) that has accumulated on top of the plant's branches as seen at right. It will allow snow to build up on top of the plant and cause limb breakage.
- If or I should say when we receive snow, remove heavy amounts from hedges and tightly grown plants to prevent limb breakage!
- Check any potted plants that you have in a lightly heated garage or basement for watering needs. Keep them on the dry side so they do not begin to push vigorous growth or start to decay. You may also wish to invest in a Min-max thermometer, which records the coldest and hottest temperatures. This will allow you to understand just how cold the garage or basement is getting on those cold winter nights. For more tender plants, even though dormant, you may wish to put them on a table to keep them off the cold floor. Bulbs like *Eucomis* (Pineapple Lily) are just fine without water for the entire winter
- If you have *Colocasia* or *Alocasia* tubers stored in a peat, potting soil mix or shredded mulch for the winter, lightly water the mix periodically (around once a month) to prevent desiccation of the tuber. Or, if they were left in their containers and the foliage is still up, water them lightly. Check for spider mites, especially in the case of any *Alocasia* that you may have brought into the living spaces of your home to serve as house plants for the winter. If you do have spider mites, wash the leaves thoroughly with regular tap water – obviously, this is more easily accomplished if you can bring the plant outside on a warmer day. If the temperatures remain cold, you can simply wipe down the leaves and stems with a moist rag.
- Repair fences! Perennials, vegetables, vines or other plants whose roots resent foot traffic typically grow adjacent to fences and prevent access during the growing season.



- Set-up and fill bird feeders. Place them near windows so the visiting birds can be both appreciated and allow you to learn who is visiting your garden!

Houseplants

- By and large, most of your houseplants need to be kept on the dry side during winter, as too much water will cause root or crown decay. Put your Poinsettias, Amaryllis or Cyclamen in a sunny southern window and water when the top of the soil becomes dry.
- Houseplants should be rotated 180 degrees every few weeks so that the plants receive equal light on all sides. Otherwise, they will start to bend towards the light and will not appear very attractive.
- *Tillandsia* or Air Plants should be soaked in warm tap water every 5-7 days.

More frequently if they are located next to heat ducts.

I have come to enjoy placing *Tillandsia* among the leaves of larger plants, such as the Jade Plant (picture at right). It provides great presentation and looks like the Jade Plant is flowering!



- If you have Coleus, succulents or other easy to root annuals in containers, you may wish to start cuttings of new plants in late January, building up your supply for the summer garden. With succulents, you can often place a leaf or a cutting on a table and over a period of several weeks, it will sprout roots, after which, it can be potted.
- Most important – pour yourself a cup of good tea or a glass of wine to celebrate your garden accomplishments of 2021. It was a tough year for a number of reasons. Personal accomplishments deserve a personal reward and no one knows those accomplishments better than you. Happy New Year!

Bruce Crawford

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