

## Gardening Notes for February

The month of January finally had some colder temperatures, a distinct difference from the above normal temperatures for December. February is the month to finalize any design considerations for the year to come since March becomes busy with gardening activities. This month is also the time to complete the ordering of seeds, since many of the more popular varieties will soon become sold out. On warmer days, make it a point to walk through your garden, enjoying its beauty and giving thought to exciting new spring improvements. Also, do not forget to visit Public Gardens to gain an appreciation for various winter interest plants. Reread your journals from last year, and focus upon how to improve those parts of the garden that performed poorly or on how to repeat last years' success stories!

### Things to do:

#### Garden

- Sharpen pruners and handsaws in preparation of the many pruning tasks to come. If you own a by-pass pruner, like a Felco (pictured at right) or Corona, take the pruner apart to sharpen since the side of the blade without the beveled edge needs to be laid flat on a sharpening stone to sharpen. An impossible task to complete properly when the pruners are assembled!
- If you own a saw with a tri-edge blade that is dull, they are notoriously difficult to sharpen and it is probably best to simply purchase several new blades to last you through the year to come.
- Clean and sharpen the edge of garden spades, as well as make certain wheelbarrows and other tools are in good shape for the season to come.
- Start to prune fruit trees, including apple, pear and quince as well as grapevines. For budded or grafted fruit trees, including Pawpaws (*Asimina*), make certain to remove root suckers, since they are actually the understock and are not the fruit variety that desired.
- Examine small trees such



as Dogwoods (*Cornus* sp.) for crossing and rubbing branches as they are now clearly evident and should be removed. Cut them just above the swelling where the branch meets the trunk, otherwise called the branch collar, which is seen at the tip of the arrow above. The collar aids in the healing process.

- Begin to prune multi-stemmed shrubs, such as Forsythia, Lilac, Deutzia and Weigela. These plants flower best on younger stems necessitating the removal of 1 to several of the oldest canes in order to provide light for the growth of new canes. For Lilac, if the plant only has one or two large trunks and is not suckering, it is most likely grafted onto privet understock. In these cases, it is safer not to prune the plant back harshly, since it will not sucker and produce new canes from the base.
- Should it snow this month, try to remove the snow from shrubs and hedges to reduce the potential for limb breakage.
- After removing the snow, prune winter damaged branches.
- Bring branches of Forsythia, Quince, Witch Hazel (Vernal Witch Hazel is pictured at right) or Stachyurus (pictured at the end) into the house for forcing or to simply enjoy the flowers and fragrance should they be in bloom.
- Continue to check on the bulbs that you have brought into the garage or placed in a protected spot outside for forcing. The Crocus and Snowdrops should be ready for you to bring inside and enjoy.
- Cut back Lenten Rose (*Hellebore x hybridus*) foliage ('Royal Heritage' is pictured at right) and other early bloomers, such that the foliage does not distract from the floral display. Watch areas where early spring bulbs are planted to avoid stepping on them!)
- As mentioned above, check where those early flowering bulbs have been planted. This has been a rather warm winter and many early risers, such as *Galanthus* spp. are appearing. Cut back any surrounding herbaceous plant material that may be interfering with any flower display.



- Check on stored tubers and corms, such as Canna, Elephant Ears or Dahlia. Discard any that are showing signs of decay.
- Check any containers of dormant plants that have been brought into a lightly heated garage, such as species of *Agave* or *Billbergia* (a Bromeliad). Although they need minimal amounts of water during winter, the soil should not become bone dry either. It is also beneficial to add a 'High-Lo' thermometer, which provides you with the lowest temperatures that the room has reached. In general, temperatures should not dip below 40°F.
- Cut back any mat forming perennials, such as *Nepeta* (Catmint). Often rodents will hide beneath the foliage and either eat the crowns or create homes. Leave behind any fallen foliage or lightly mulch to protect the crowns from freezing temperatures.
- Assuming there is no major snow accumulations at month's end, some of the herbaceous plant material can begin to be cut back to the ground. Consider cutting the material into short lengths and leaving it in place as a mulch. To help make the bed look 'maintained', spread shredded bark mulch around the border of the bed. Once the plant material begins to grow, only the shredded bark near the edge will be visible, providing what most people consider to be an 'acceptable' treatment of the herbaceous beds!
- Do not remove any temporary winter mulch on Perennial beds, such as the boughs from the Christmas tree, unless it is around those early blooming bulbs. Late February and early March can still be bitterly cold.
- Continue to apply anti-desiccant sprays to recently planted Rhododendrons, Hollies, Camellias or other evergreens that are in an exposed location on days with above freezing temperatures.
- Watch for deer predation and set up fencing if needed.
- When temperatures rise into the 40's, get a head start on edging those bedlines and spreading mulch where possible. Every day that you can complete a springtime chore will relieve some of the burden of the April panic to get everything done.

#### Vegetables

- Clean-up the greenhouse. Check on the heat mats and grow lights to make certain everything works and is clean. Check to make certain there is sufficient potting soil, labels, fresh markers for labelling and pots for the seeding and potting tasks to come?
- Near the end of the month, start to sow seeds indoors for cool season crops such as Broccoli, Cabbage and Leeks and for warmer season crops or ornamentals, such as Begonias, Eggplants and Hot Peppers.
- Finish ordering seed for spring. Go through your stored seed and discard packages that are over 2 years old. Or, you can place some of the older seeds on a moist paper towel and place in a warm spot (like on top of the refrigerator) to evaluate the percentage of germination. If few seeds germinate, discard the package. Organize them by sowing time to make life easier for April and May!

#### Houseplants

- Keeping a log of when the plants have been watered has proven to be an incredible help to me, since I always forget when the plants were last watered!

- With the days becoming longer towards the end of the month, begin to water indoor plants every 1-2 weeks vs 2-3 weeks. Refrain from oversaturating the soil, since that will encourage fungus gnats & root decay.
- If your houseplants have been in a container for several years and have become pot bound, the end of February is a good time to up-pot the plants into a larger container. Make certain the pot is only 1-3" larger in diameter and has a drainage hole at the base. If the plant is placed in too large a container, it often results in the plant becoming overwatered which the drainage hole also ensures!
- With the sun getting stronger and their window perch getting warmer, check as well for an increase in insect populations as they too enjoy the stronger sun!



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