

Note that the information in our monthly tips is intended for gardening in the Bountiful, UT area and may not be accurate for different climates.

December Gardening

Ave High 39° F
Ave Low 27° F
Ave Moisture 1.37"

Each year is different, let the weather be your guide. Use this gardening guide as a simple reminder as to what needs to be done in your garden this month.

December is a festive season. It is a busy time for all: Shopping, decorating, and entertaining all take top billing this month. Fall officially changes to winter this month, but with the winter holidays, one hardly notices the official passage into winter.



By now, planting chores and winter prep are completed in the garden and yard. Many of the leftover chores are hold-overs from last month's list. Yet, there are a few other things you can continue to do in the home, yard, and garden this month:

Houseplants

✓ Water houseplants with tepid water. Cold tap water may shock plants.



✓ Purchase some Christmas Cactus, Kalanchoes, Cyclamens, Amaryllis, and Poinsettias to make your home more festive. Make sure these plants are well protected before leaving the store for the trip home. Houseplants can die just from the cold temperature it gets from the store to your car, or from your car to your front door.

✓ Be sure to remove any foil wraps on the containers. These festive wraps can hold water in the pots, which might cause the plants to rot from excess moisture. Put your plants in a saucer. When you water your plants, add enough water that fills the saucer about half full. Let the plant sit in the saucer for an hour and then discard any remaining water. Do not water your plant again until the soil starts to dry out.

Buy a Moisture Meter to help you know when the soil is dry.

✓ Houseplants can suffer from the lack of humidity. Growing plants near 'pebble filled trays and saucers' can help maintain humidity around plants. Set your plants on the pebbles, and fill the saucer or tray with water to just the top of the pebbles.

✓ Glossy leaved house plants such as Philodendrons, Rubber plants, and Palms should be sponged off periodically with a soft, damp cloth, to allow them to breathe.

✓ Plants which have fuzzy, textured, or other non-glossy type leaves should be set in the sink and sprayed gently with room temperature water, until the dust is cleaned away. Be sure that the foliage is allowed to dry completely.



✓ Monitor your houseplants for insects very carefully. Any eggs, or insect that are left over from summer will become very prolific in just a few weeks.



✓ Watch for the pesky fungus gnats. They can come home on a poinsettia, an amaryllis, or on almost any other plant. *Fungus gnats* are one of the most annoying plant pests, but they cause very little damage to the plant. These insects look like 'fruit flies'. They usually fly from the soil whenever the pot is disturbed. They like carbon dioxide, so they fly toward any source, usually your nose or mouth.

There are two steps to get rid of these pests. 1. Get rid of the source - the eggs. 2. Get rid of the adults - the nuisance stage.

1. The source. a. Apply an insecticide to the soil such as Bonide Systemic Houseplant Insecticide. b. Cover the soil with 1/4" to 1/2" of fine gravel or coarse sand. The adults cannot lay eggs in the gravel or sand. c. Wash the plant pots and saucers to remove any food source. d. Put a penny in the saucer to help prevent future insects in the saucer.

2. The adults. a. Put yellow sticky traps around your houseplants. b. Spray an insecticide on the soil surface and on the leaves every 4 or 5 days for at least two weeks.

✓ *Mealybugs* look like small white cotton tufts, usually where the leaves join the stem. Touch them with a cotton swab dipped in alcohol to remove them.

✓ *Aphids* usually are concentrated on new growth. They are small, often green, white, or yellow. If you find these insects, spray with insecticidal soap. Repeat once a week for a month.

✓ *Spidermites* are so small they are very difficult to see. If the leaves are drying up, or look dusty, put a sheet of white paper under the leaf. Shake the leaf until dust falls on the paper. Watch the dust for a minute. If the dust begins to move, you have spider mites. They are very difficult to control. Spray with an insecticide that lists spidermites, and is safe for indoor use. You should repeat weekly for a month.

✓ Buy some amaryllis bulbs to grow on a table or in the windowsill. Depending upon variety, some staking might be required.

✓ If you successfully prepared last year's amaryllis bulb, repot it now. Plant it in fresh Black Gold Potting Soil. Keep 1/3 of the bulb above the soil surface for best results. Water and fertilize regularly to help



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your bulb reach its best potential. If the bulb is the same size or larger than it was last year, it should bloom this year. If the bulb is smaller than it was last year, it may not bloom until next year.

√ If you potted up some hyacinth, daffodil or tulip bulbs, last fall for forcing, check on them. Make sure they are moist, and in the dark until they have established their root systems (usually 8 weeks). If they have filled their containers with roots, and if the new top growth has begun, bring them out into a cool room, with indirect light. After a week or so, move them into bright light, and watch them start to grow and bloom during the middle of winter.



√ If you successfully kept last year's Poinsettia alive, and have been keeping it in 14 hours of darkness since September, your Poinsettias should be ready bring back into the living room by December first. With the proper care, these Christmas plants will remain beautiful for many weeks.

√ Poinsettias prefer to be kept on the cool side, 65-70 degrees during the day and 55-60 at night. Keep them in bright, natural light whenever possible. Keep them away from heat sources. Keep them out of hot or cold drafts. Be sure to water them consistently, before they become dry. Never allow them to stand in water for more than an hour. If you want to keep them past the Christmas season, be sure to fertilize them regularly with Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer.

Roses

√ If your roses aren't protected yet, do so as soon as possible. Spray an anti-desiccant (Wilt Prufe) on any exposed canes when the daytime temps are above 40. Mound soil, mulch, and leaves around the base of the plants to about 6 to 18 inches above the base of the bushes. This is especially true of hybrid teas, floribundas, and roses that have been growing in the yard less than two years, and any other marginally hardy rose. If any variety was newly planted this past season, or has been in the ground less than two years, protection is a good idea.



Wild Bird

√ Continue to keep birdfeeders filled. Birds offer a lot of winter interest, and by making your property attractive to birds, these helpmates might decide that your place would make a good home next year.



√ In the summer and fall, birds eat more insects for protein than seeds. A chickadee will eat from 200-500 insects, and 4000 eggs/larvae per day.

√ In the winter, birds need lots of extra energy to stay warm. They must eat virtually all day long to survive. At 5° F, a sparrow can live without food for up to 15 hours. During the summer, a bird can go up to three days without food.

√ Many birds migrate to the region from further north, but many birds make our region their year-around home. You will be amazed at how many visitors will come to call during the winter months if you provide a steady supply of suet, seed, and fresh water!

Miscellaneous

√ Take cuttings of holly and evergreen boughs indoors for Christmas decorating. Also fill outdoor window boxes with Christmas greens and decorative bows.



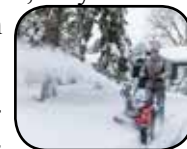
√ Keep fresh-cut Christmas trees in a cool, not freezing location. After bringing a tree home, cut 1 to 2" from the base and plunge it into a bucket of tepid water with preservative added to prevent the cut end from sealing over. Don't let the water run dry! When bringing a tree indoors for decorating, allow it to rest in the stand with water in it for several hours to allow the tree to "relax" its branches as it becomes acclimated to indoor warmth. Then decorate.

√ This year, consider purchasing a living Christmas tree for your home. This is an excellent way to improve your landscape, and at the same time, save a tree. Before bringing a living tree into the house, water it thoroughly.



√ Potted Christmas trees should be placed in a cool, not freezing, area until they can be brought indoors for decorating. These trees should not be brought inside for extended periods. A few days before Christmas and a few days after will not harm them. Living Christmas trees should not be kept in the house for any longer than 10 days. If kept too long indoors, they will break dormancy. After Christmas, take the tree out to the area where you prepared the planting site earlier, and plant it. Water well and mulch.

√ Remove any stray leaves that may have blown in around your plants. If they are not shredded, they can mat down around your plants and smother them or promote rotting.



√ Generally, we have already experienced a good snowstorm or two by Decem-

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ber. Some years, however, autumn lingers long into this month. Continue watering outside plants when the weather is above freezing, if there has not been sufficient precipitation, and the ground has not frozen. Drain hoses after removing them from the faucets to prevent damage to hoses and plumbing.



√ Try to take a daily walking tour of your yard, as the weather permits. Observe frost patterns in your yard in early morning. See where frost lingers, where frost does not hit, and write this down in your diary or journal. Often a surprise plant or two will be blooming in a protected spot. These are indicators of microclimates, and you can use this information when planning on where to site plants.

√ Check the coldframe for any problems. Make sure plants are overwintering without the problems of standing water, field mice, disease, insects, or excessive cold. Prop it open on days that are sunny and above freezing to prevent excessive warming of your plants.

√ Have a gardener on your gift list? A gift certificate to a nursery or garden center would be appreciated. Another good idea would be a gift subscription to a gardening magazine.

√ Make sure your outdoor faucets are covered to protect them from freezing. Don't let your hose freeze and burst. Stretch it out with both ends open, to allow the water to drain completely. Coil it up and put it away.

√ Start planning for next year by making notes and preparing orders. Track the progress of your garden. A very important but often overlooked record is that of your garden's progress. Next year, you'll look back to see the result of specific pest applications or the result of adding a soil conditioner. Successful gardening is a process of trial and error. By noting the success or failure of each plant, you create a plan for future success.

√ Include the dates when each plant bloomed and when fruits or vegetables were ready to harvest. If you're tracking flowers, make sure you record bloom times and the plant's reaction to dead-heading or other pruning methods.

√ Clean and oil garden hand tools for winter. Use your old lawnmower oil to clean and oil your shovels, rakes, hoes, loppers, and many other gardening tools. Fill a bucket with clean sand and put your old lawnmower oil in the sand. Once you get enough oil in the



sand, the sand does a great job of cleaning and oiling the tools. Just scrape off most of the dirt and push your tool back and forth into the sand. Let the tool sit in the bucket of sand for a few days. After a day or two in the sand, remove the tool, wipe off the sand and oil, and your tool will be ready for use or for winter storage.



√ Store any left over chemicals and lawn fertilizers in dry location and out of reach of children and pets. Store pesticides in a cool (not freezing) dry location for winter, out of reach of children and pets. Read our handout **Winter Gardening - Storage** for more information.

√ Gardening catalogs should start arriving this month. Start a list of items that you want to purchase for planting next spring. This is also a good time to take out any pictures you have taken of your gardens during the past growing season. You can see what you might need to add to your gardens and yard.

√ Be careful using ice melters on your cement and around your shrubs; too much can ruin concrete and kill plants. Use ice melters sparingly. Ammonia sulphate fertilizer melts ice, but it can damage concrete more than salt. Urea fertilizer melts ice but not if the temperature is too cold. Urea is safe to use on concrete. Salt, Fertilizer and Commercial Ice Melters all have advantages and disadvantages. Read our handout **Ice Melter Info.** for more information.

√ Turn compost pile to encourage winter breakdown.

√ Prevent garden ponds from freezing solid in winter. Covering ponds with an insulating material, or floating a stock tank water heater in the pond, will lessen the chance of ice damage.

√ To learn more about Deer Proofing your yard, please read our **Animal Repellant Handout**, or download a copy of **Minimizing Deer Damage** from the Utah division of Wildlife Resources.

<http://wildlife.utah.gov/habitat/deer-browse.php>

Trees & Shrubs

√ Enjoy your neighbor's yellow twig dogwood, or red twig dogwood this winter, they're absolutely stunning in the winter. Buy one next spring for your yard.



√ Prune damaged branches throughout the winter months. Remember to water newly planted trees and shrubs in winter to prevent dry soil conditions.

√ Prune maples trees, birch trees, grapevines and any

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plants that tend to bleed in the winter. If you prune these plants in the spring, they tend to bleed sap for several days or weeks. Although the bleeding does not kill the plants, it can attract insects and cause stress for people who see the sap running down the trunk.



✓ Winter snow and rains usually take care of watering your plants. However, plants and shrubs which are growing beneath large evergreens, or underneath the eaves of the house, may be dry this time of year. Lack of water in the cold winter months can be fatal to many of these plants. A quick check will let you know if you need to do a little winter watering. The best method to water plants under decks or under pine trees is to just throw snow on them. When the weather is warm, the snow will melt. When the weather is cold, it will act as an insulation blanket.

✓ If there is a sudden drop in the temperature, provide extra protection for your more tender plants. You can provide temporary, protection by driving in three or four stakes around the plant, and then simply covering the plant with burlap, a frost blanket, a sheet or an old blanket. Make sure the weight of heavy snow will not crush the plant.

Flowers

✓ Apply mulch to your flowerbeds as the ground freezes to prevent freeze/thaw heave and premature breaking of dormancy.

✓ Store leftover seeds and a cool, dry location, for example, in a sealed jar placed in the refrigerator.



✓ If you have been keeping up with your gardening tasks for the last few months, you should be able to take it pretty easy this month, at least outside in the garden.

✓ Check on any bulbs, corms, and tubers which you dug up, and stored this fall. Remove and discard any which show signs of disease or rot.

✓ Enjoy the blades of your ornamental grasses as they sway in the breeze.

Vegetables & Fruits



✓ Check fruits & vegetables in storage for spoilage. Enjoy eating your harvest often.

✓ Order a fruit basket for your neighbors.

✓ Buy a case of oranges, apples, or grapefruit.

✓ Supplement your food storage program by storing garden seeds. Buy a **'Garden in a Can'**. This product contains enough, non-hybrid, seeds to grow an average vegetable garden. The seeds are sealed in an air tight container that can last for up to 6 years, longer if kept cold.

