

# December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12



# Table of Contents

- Be Inspired With Indoor Herb Gardening** ..... 1
- Books Every Gardener Should Have** ..... 11
- Upcoming Events** ..... 18
- Edible Gardening in December** ..... 20
- Easy Fruit** ..... 25
- December Tips for the Ornamental Gardener** ..... 29

# Be Inspired With Indoor Herb Gardening

By Susan Martin | December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12



At this time of year, starting an indoor herb garden is an inspiring idea. Add a handful of fresh parsley to the turkey stuffing. Dress up boiled potatoes with fresh rosemary. Snip some fresh chives into eggs and hash browns. Sprinkle fresh oregano in soups and pasta dishes. Cooking with fresh herbs makes me feel like a chef, not just the person whose turn it is to make dinner. Plus, it's so convenient to have everything on hand. No checking of expiration dates on the windowsill basil!

I used the term "indoor herb garden," but that may be too intimidating. Although it looks magazine-beautiful to have a basket of several different herbs of various green hues and textures, a multiple-plant grouping presents challenges. While most herbs share the same general needs, some herbs have specific preferences. Using individual potting containers makes it easier to cater to specific needs, promote air circulation, and provide ample space for each plant as it matures. If you like the look of containers with multiple herbs, or if space is a constraint, group herbs with similar light, water, temperature, and humidity requirements.

This article will focus on growing indoor herbs to use in everyday cooking. We'll look at a few basic herbs and their requirements. You can then add your personal favorites based on these general guidelines, plus your own additional research.

## GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

### LIGHT

Light is the most important variable for growing herbs indoors. Herbs that are not exposed to their preferred light conditions will become thin and spindly, produce smaller leaves, and have a reduced aroma. Be sure your herbs get at least **six hours of sunlight a day**. An easy way to judge this beforehand is to put an empty pot where you plan to place your herbs and watch how the sun changes throughout the day. Southern exposure is best, western exposure is next best. If plants are grown on windowsills, it will be necessary to rotate pots often so that each side gets enough light for uniform growth. Depending on your home's sun exposure, you may need to use supplemental lighting. Or, you can choose herbs that can thrive with the light you naturally have, and eliminate the "sun-hogs" that won't be at their best.

### SUPPLEMENTAL LIGHTING

General advice is to place herbs 6-12" from **two 40-watt, cool white fluorescent bulbs for 14-16 hours**. There are many sources for very handy, **counter-top herb gardens with lights**. You may also build your own fluorescent-enhanced herb garden; a google search will reveal many DIY plans, although these tend to be for "operations" larger than kitchen counters. Or, you can use an **easy clip-on light** that works on one small area at a time (presumably not close to cooking activity), or **tube-style lights** that can hang from underneath kitchen cabinets. You'll need to weigh the pros and cons of taking these extra steps.



*Countertop garden with herb pods, Photo: Jennifer Greenlaw*

### SOIL

**Most herbs like loose soil that drains easily. Most do well in a soilless potting mix.** For even more drainage, mix two parts good-quality, soilless potting mixture and one part perlite. Straight potting soil is too compact and heavy for good drainage. You can make a customized soil mix by using 1/3 potting soil, 1/3 organic matter (peat moss, compost, or leaf mold), and 1/3 perlite. (See this [link](#) for a description of the differences between perlite and vermiculite, and when to use each.)

### WATER

Water each herb as needed; **many herbs like to be on the slightly-dry side**. Separate pots allow you to monitor water needs for each plant. Bay, marjoram, oregano, sage, and thyme need to dry out between watering. Never allow rosemary or chives to dry out completely. Basil likes moist, but not wet soil, with excellent drainage to avoid root rot. Generally, more indoor herbs die from overwatering than from underwatering. If the plant is limp or has yellow leaves, test the soil with your finger before watering.

### HUMIDITY

Herbs also require a proper **balance between a humid environment and adequate air circulation**. When grouped together, containers create a humid environment. However, the closely-grouped containers may not allow sufficient air circulation. Basil and rosemary are susceptible to powdery mildew. This again highlights the advantage of using separate pots. You can rearrange group containers to allow space for more air circulation. For herbs that like humidity, such as rosemary and parsley, **pots can be placed in a pan of moist pebbles, or misted twice weekly with a water sprayer**.



*Herbs on pebbles, Photo: Markus Spiske, Unsplash*

## FERTILIZATION

Fertilize herbs with a **low dose of liquid fertilizer**, such as fish emulsion, seaweed, or a general purpose, water-soluble fertilizer used at half the label-recommended strength. Some herbs require very little fertilizer, some can benefit from applications every 4-6 weeks. Over-fertilizing may negatively affect an herb's aroma and taste.

## TEMPERATURE

Ideally, herbs prefer room temperatures of at least a 65-70°F during the day and 55-60°F at night. You and your plants may have different opinions on what temperatures are most comfortable! Some herbs like indoor temperatures warmer, some like them cooler. You should definitely avoid placing herbs by a fireplace or a heat vent. Also avoid drafty windows, or placing the pot right next to the glass on a freezing night. A sunny windowsill can become a chilly spot for basil after the sun goes down. You may need to shift plants around to keep them happy. But that's what we do for our plants!

## CONTAINERS

**Choose pots that have drainage holes. All herbs need good drainage.** There are pros and cons to using clay pots. Clay pots are porous which allows air and water to flow through them. This helps prevent root rot. Clay tends to dry out quickly, however, so watering is needed more frequently. A glazed or plastic container won't dry out as quickly. This advantage can turn into a con if you tend to overwater. Take care with the saucers you choose. Clay saucers can leave wet marks on window sills and furniture. Plastic saucers are less likely to leave water stains, but placing protection under any type of saucer will help reduce the risk of water stains. If herbs are placed on a non-porous kitchen countertop, staining will be less of a problem. If you're tight on counter space and don't have a convenient area in proximity, combining herbs in a hanging basket might be a good alternative. In this case, **group herbs that have similar requirements**. For example, don't put basil with oregano and thyme. Be on the lookout throughout the year for fun and attractive pots for giving herbs as gifts. Just make sure to select pots with drainage holes.

## PROPAGATION

The easiest and quickest way to get started is to purchase healthy starter plants. But, if you want to start from seed, see this [article](#) from the University of Illinois Extension. Many herbs can be easily started from stem cuttings of existing plants. See this [article](#) from *The Garden Shed* on starting plants from stem cuttings. It's too late this year for taking cuttings from outdoor plants, but perhaps you're overwintering a large, containerized herb in the house - you could start a little stem cutting plant to keep in the kitchen. Or, you could simply tuck this idea away for next year.

## POPULAR HERBS FOR INDOOR GROWING

[Virginia Tech recommends](#) that most of the herbs that have a mature height shorter than 12" may be grown in 6" pots as indoor plants. Many dwarf varieties of larger herbs are appropriate indoors, as well, including, spicy globe basil, dwarf sage, winter savory, parsley, chives, and varieties of oregano and thyme. Any herbs with a taproot, such as dill (*Anethum graveolens*), require deep pots. Consider the size of plants your space can accommodate.

### SUGGESTED HERBS

The following herbs are **frequently used for cooking, and appropriate to growing indoors:**

#### **Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)**

The leaves of basil have numerous oil glands with aromatic volatile oil, which makes it such a pleasure to have in the house. Just as with outside plants, basil should be pinched back to promote bushiness, and to prevent flower heads from forming. This plant likes a **sunny southern exposure and consistently warm room temperatures, both day and evening**. Basil leaves will droop and fade after a short time in cool air, so avoid putting basil in a drafty spot, or next to a window on cold nights. While the **soil should be kept somewhat moist**, it should never be soggy, which could cause root rot. **General houseplant fertilizer can be used** at half the label-recommended strength every 4-6 weeks; apply to the soil, avoid getting it on stems or leaves. **Spicy globe basil** is a compact variety suitable for indoors. Don't be dismayed if you need to replace the basil and start again. It's a small price to pay for something that works in so many recipes! Or, you may decide to label basil as a "sun hog" and move on to something else.



*Basil, Photo: Stephanie Studer, Unsplash*

#### **Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)**

Chives are much less finicky about indoor conditions. They **tolerate the lower light of the winter sun, as well as temperature fluctuations** characteristic of a kitchen windowsill that can range from 55-75° F. Chives grow best when watered frequently, as long as there is proper soil drainage. **Soil should be moist but not wet.** Tips of foliage will turn yellow if the plant is too dry. Use a liquid fertilizer at half the label-recommended strength every four to six weeks. Once the plant is 6" tall, cut leaves with a scissors as needed, leaving at least 2" of growth above the soil. The plant will continue to grow. The **Grolau variety**, appropriately called **Windowsill Chives**, was bred for growing indoors. It has extra strong flavor, thick, dark leaves, and is less susceptible to becoming leggy.



*Chives, Photo: Katka Pavlickova, Unsplash*

**Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)**

This perennial herb from the Mediterranean **likes it hot and bright**. If there's no spot in your home that receives six hours of sun per day, you may have to supplement with fluorescent lights or grow lights. **Water only when the soil feels completely dry**. Poke your finger about ½" into the dirt. You can fertilize occasionally with liquid fertilizer at half the label-recommended strength, but fertilization is generally unnecessary. Oregano can be grown from seed, or from cuttings of high-flavor plants. Do not allow the plant to flower; this will reduce growth or stop growth completely. Flowering also reduces the flavor of the leaves. When harvesting, remove the stem tips, leaving 4-6 pairs of leaves on the plant in order for it to produce side shoots for additional harvesting. Leaves should be stripped from the stems by running your fingers down the stems. Chop the leaves before use. **Greek oregano, or true oregano**, has an excellent flavor. Another popular variety with an intense flavor is '**Profusion**' ® **oregano**.



Oregano plant in a pot, Photo: (Cropped to highlight oregano) Netha Hussain, [CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons](#)

### **Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)**

The most common variety is common or **curly parsley, *Petroselinum crispum***. Curly parsley typically grows 8-14" tall, and is a good candidate for growing indoors. **Italian flat-leaf parsley, *P. neapolitanum***, is another popular variety. The flat, serrated leaves have a much stronger and sweeter flavor than the other varieties, making it more desirable for cooking.



Set parsley in a **sunny, preferably south-facing window** where

it will receive 6-8 hours of direct sunlight every day. If your window doesn't provide that much light, supplement it with fluorescent lighting. Turn the pot every 3-4 days so that the plant doesn't lean into the sun. **Parsley also needs humidity,** and you may need to **mist the plants from time to time.** If the leaves look dry and brittle, **set the plant on top of a tray of pebbles and add water** to the tray, leaving the tops of the pebbles exposed. The plants may be a bit spindly when grown indoors because of lower light levels. Use a liquid fertilizer at half the label-recommended strength every 4-6 weeks. Harvest parsley by snipping off the stalks close to the soil, beginning with the outside stalks. If you just cut the tops off and the leaf stalks remain, the plant will be less productive.

### **Rosemary (*Rosemarinus officinalis*)**



Rosemary, Photo: Vincent Foret on Unsplash

Rosemary prefers a **cool, sunny location where the humidity is high**. The herb dries out quickly in an indoor growing environment, and may exhibit brown leaf tips and die-back. Do not react to these signs by watering the plant more; this could lead to root rot and loss of the plant. **Rosemary likes dry roots, and prefers to absorb moisture from the air through its foliage**. Keep the plant cool, and **place it on pebble-filled saucers**. Make sure there is always some water in the saucer, but not above the level of the pebbles. This helps to increase humidity around the plant and reduce foliage damage. **Frequent misting**, twice weekly, is also helpful. Rosemary doesn't require much fertilizing outdoors or indoors. When the plant is 6" tall, cut leaves as needed leaving at least 2" of growth above the soil. Don't let the branches get too spiky - trim them back to keep the plant bushy. You can use any *R. officinalis* for cooking, but upright kinds with broader leaves contain more aromatic oil.

'**Spice Island**' is a variety normally sold in the herb section of the nursery. '**Tuscan Blue**' is the favorite of many chefs; '**Blue Spires**' and '**Miss Jessup's Upright**' are also good. Rosemary is easily propagated from cuttings. See the section on propagation below.

### **Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)**

Common thyme is native to the western Mediterranean region, and **prefers full sun. It can, however, tolerate indirect light** if you are running out of prime sun spots for other needy herbs. The most popular thyme is **English thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*), which is not native to England, but was introduced by the Romans. Its strong, distinctive flavor is what most of us associate with the herb. Another good culinary option is **French thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*), a variety of English thyme that has narrower, grey-green leaves and a slightly sweeter flavor. It is often preferred by chefs, and is excellent for seasoning meat, fish, soup, and vegetables. Another option is **lemon thyme** (*Thymus x citriodorus*). It's lemony taste and scent is a great addition to chicken, fish, and salads that can use a citrusy overlay.

Thyme is a hardy plant and will do very well when kept trimmed and in good light. **Water the thyme only when the soil feels dry.** Poke your finger about ½” into the soil. If it’s dry, give the plant a good soaking, pouring in enough water so that it drains into the saucer. Thyme has small, wiry stems; to harvest, strip the leaves from the stems by running your fingers down the stems. Thyme’s primary oil, thymol, is considered an antiseptic.

## HARVESTING

Clipping your herbs to use for cooking is the biggest reason to growing them. This “pruning” is beneficial to the plants as well, as long as you clip **less than one-third of the plant at one time.**

## INSECTS

The high concentration of essential oils in healthy, actively growing herbs repels most insects. However, aphids and spider mites can be a problem. If **aphids** are a problem, **wash the leaves with water.** **Aphids seem to be more prevalent in crowded conditions. Spider mites thrive in dry conditions** and can be controlled by spraying the plants with plain water at regular intervals. You can also use a soapy solution of 1-2 tablespoons of a mild soap, such as dishwashing soap, to one gallon of warm water. Spray infested plants with the solution once a week while pests are visible.

## COOKING WITH HERBS

When using fresh herbs in a recipe, a general guideline is to **use three times as much as you would use of a dried herb.** When substituting, you’ll often be more successful substituting fresh herbs for dried herbs, rather than the other way around. If you pick more than you need, store the extra in an open or perforated plastic bag (use a sharp object to make several small holes) in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator for a few days. After picking, wash smaller amounts of herbs thoroughly under running water, shake off the moisture, and pat off any remaining moisture with clean paper towels. For a larger amount of herbs, you could use a salad spinner. Unlike dried herbs, **fresh herbs are usually added toward the end in cooked dishes** to preserve their flavor. Add the more delicate herbs – basil, chives, cilantro, dill leaves, parsley, marjoram and mint – a minute or two before the end of cooking, or sprinkle them on the food before it’s served. The less delicate herbs, such as oregano, rosemary, tarragon and thyme, can be added about the last 20 minutes of cooking. Add fresh herbs to refrigerated cold foods several hours before serving; this helps the flavors to blend.

## SUMMARY

An indoor herb garden is a sensory experience, adding fragrance to the kitchen, beauty to the eye, and flavor to food—flavor that can help reduce the need for salt, fat, and sugar. Researchers are finding that many culinary herbs (both fresh and dried) have antioxidants that may help protect against diseases such as cancer and heart disease. Providing sufficient light is the most challenging part of growing herbs indoors. When herbs are grouped in containers, make sure the selections have compatible light, water, temperature, and humidity requirements. An herb garden can be a selection of plants, or just one or two favorites in single pots. Extend the growing season, and have some fun!



*Thyme in a pot. Photo: Netha Hussain, CC BY-SA 4.0*

## SOURCES

“Creating New Plants From Cuttings,” *The Garden Shed* (November 2020),  
<https://pmgarchives.com/article/creating-new-plants-from-cuttings/>

“Herbs in Containers and Growing Indoors,” University of Maryland Extension,  
<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/herbs-containers-and-growing-indoors>

“Perlite vs. vermiculite,” *Plumeria Today*,  
<https://plumeria.today/care/soils-and-growing-mediums/perlite-vs-vermiculite/>

“Growing Herbs Indoors,” PennState Extension, <https://extension.psu.edu/growing-herbs-indoors>

“Herb Culture and Its Use,” Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension,  
<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-420/426-420.html>

“Herbs in Southern Gardens,” University of Georgia Extension,  
<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1170&title=Herbs%20in%20Southern%20Gardens>

“Herbs,” Clemson Cooperative Extension, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/herbs/>

“Herb Gardening - Rosemary,” University of Illinois Extension,  
<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/herbs/rosemary.cfm>

“Herb Gardening - Greek Oregano,” University of Illinois Extension,  
<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/herbs/oregano.cfm>

“Growing Parsley in Home Gardens,” University of Minnesota Extension,  
<https://extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-parsley#preservation-938312>

“T” is for Thyme,” New York Botanical Garden,  
<https://www.nybg.org/blogs/plant-talk/2014/07/tip-of-the-week/t-is-for-thyme/>

“Growing Chives in Home Gardens,” University of Minnesota,  
<https://extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-chives#watering-934460>

“Herb Gardening - Chives.” University of Illinois Extension,  
<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/herbs/chives.cfm>

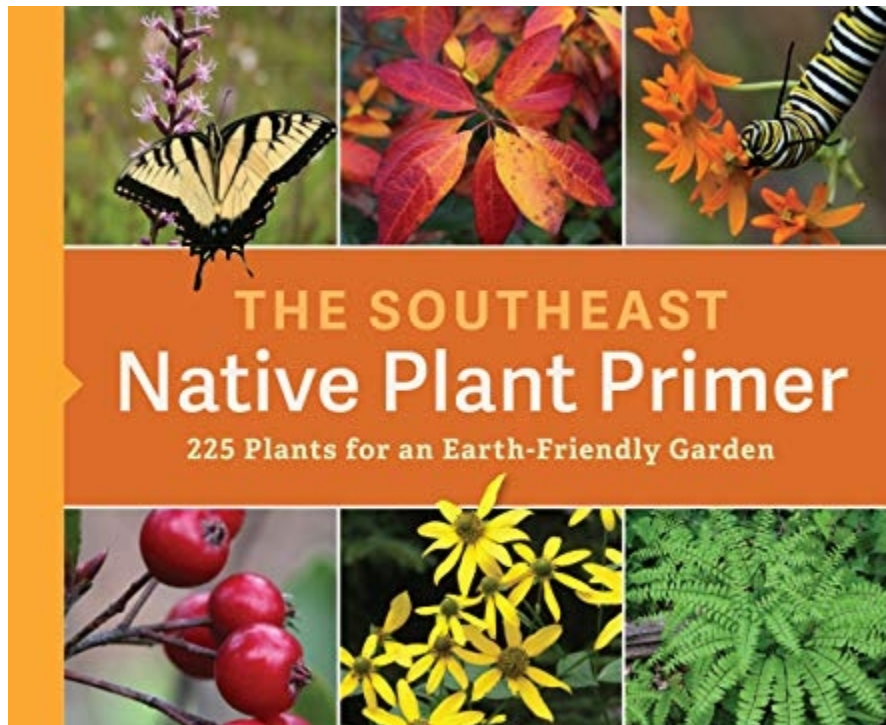
“Herb Gardening - Sweet Basil,” University of Illinois Extension,  
<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/herbs/basil.cfm>

“Healthy Cooking with Fresh Herbs,” Purdue University Extension, White County,  
<https://extension.purdue.edu/White/article/25951>

Feature Photo by [Carolyn V](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Books Every Gardener Should Have

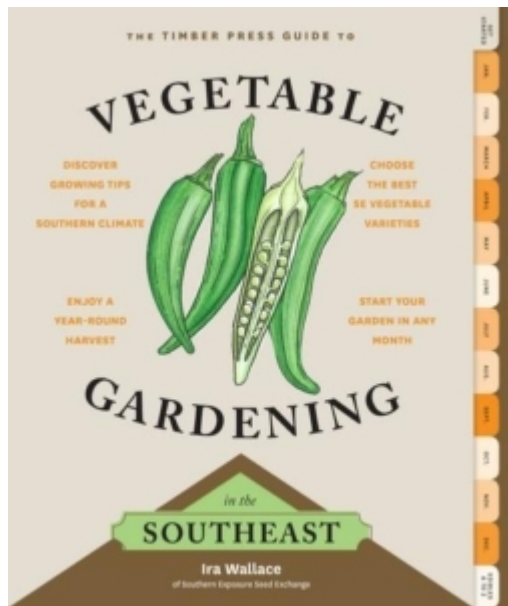
By Cathy Caldwell | December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12



Yes, it's that time of year, when normally thoughts turn to presents, and your to-do list no longer fits on a small sticky note. Never fear, books are here! This year in particular, when we will not be able to do our usual entertaining and holiday parties because of COVID-19, you actually have even more reason to "gift" books. We may all have more time to read.

As gardeners, we have favorite "go to" books that provide gardening wisdom and inspiration, some old, some new. I think of a great book as a mentor. It is impossible to write about all of them, but here are my top dozen picks.

For the **vegetable gardener** in Central Virginia, I highly recommend [\*The Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast\*](#), by Ira Wallace of Southern Seed Exchange in Louisa. Ira has much to say about the various geographic areas in the southeastern U.S. with regard to growing season profiles, weather, and the timing of seasonal changes in plants (known as phenology) due to climate change and erratic weather.



The Gardening 101 and Garden Planning sections include many helpful tips on site location, planting systems, soil tests, compost, mulching, what to direct sow or transplant, the importance of rotating crops, and the use of cover crops. Ira notes that “gardening is a year-round activity in our region” and provides a month-by-month section listing the possibilities and to-do tasks. There is also a Skill Set panel for each month that goes beyond the basics, covering topics such as how to conduct a home seed germination test, how to build a low tunnel for frost protection, how to make compost, and how to save seeds.

The third section has planting and harvesting charts for the upper vs. lower South, followed by an A-to-Z list of edibles, covering 38 different vegetables. Each crop has one page of information, divided into growing, harvesting, varieties, and seed saving details.

The book concludes with a great list of Resources, including seed and plant suppliers, community resources, weather and climate, tools and supplies, as well as more good books. The glossary demystifies any terms that you may not understand. This book is a must-have for both the new and experienced gardener and is particularly helpful for those folks new to the Southeast. As mentioned above, Ira Wallace is a worker/owner with Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, and their website, [www.southernexposure.com](http://www.southernexposure.com), offers lots of great information, including photos of vegetable crops in action.

In this year of COVID-19, many households are interested in growing more of their own food. Another good read for beginning gardeners who care about the climate is [\*Growing Good Food: A Citizen's Guide to Climate Victory Gardening\*](#) by Acadia Tucker (Stone Pier Press, 2019). The author encourages us to grow our own climate victory garden, to do our part to mitigate climate change, and to help the land absorb more carbon dioxide — “all while growing nutritious food.” Using climate science, Tucker focuses on building carbon-rich soil and provides a wealth of guidance on “regenerative” gardening and growing your own organic food. Along the way she offers practical advice on starting a garden, preparing the soil, making compost, mulching, and much more. She invites us all to think of gardening as a civic action; she maintains that if more of us are committed to growing our own food and doing it in a way that is good for the environment, then we are all helping to address some of the effects of climate change and to promote food resilience. Tucker has a new book that will be available in early 2021: *Tiny Victory Gardens: Growing Good Food Without A Yard*. This book will profile 21 crops that are easy to grow in containers and describes some of her practices for growing and managing crops in very small spaces (square inches rather than square feet).



Today, perhaps more than ever, societal concerns and ecological considerations about pesticide use have become increasingly important in shaping pest control practices and management decisions. To learn more, check out this article in The Garden Shed on [Integrated Pest Management](#). Every gardener and landscaper needs to have a good IPM resource guide. I recommend the following guides that I use regularly:

- [Managing Insects and Mites on Woody Plants: an IPM Approach](#), Third Edition, John A Davidson, Ph.D. and Michael J. Raupp, Ph.D.

This is a great resource for quickly researching and identifying more than 145 insect and mite pests on woody plants. This introduction to the Integrated Pest Management principles guides you with recommendations for developing your own program. Learning to identify the various stages of an insect and their life cycle is key. This book includes a pest monitoring timetable, their preferred host plants, an explanation of biological control, and tips for selecting pesticides compatible with integrated pest management practices.

- [Vegetable Integrated Pest Management with an Emphasis on Biocontrol](#), A Guide for Growers in the Mid-Atlantic, PENN State Extension

This guide is designed to help vegetable growers manage insect pests based on sound integrated pest management principles. It was developed to help gardeners identify, monitor, and control insects found on vegetables. One section is devoted to “Vegetable Crop Families and Their Common Pests.” Another section has A-to-Z pest fact sheets that provides helpful information on the preferred host crop for each pest, damage potential, signs and symptoms, identification, life cycle, monitoring and management strategies, thresholds and control options. This guide is loaded with color photos, which will help you develop your pest-identifying skills. Also included are fact sheets on the common beneficial insects which help control destructive insects. The last section of this guide includes a control timing calendar to highlight the best window of time for controlling a particular pest.

- [Good Bug Bad Bug, All you Need to Know About the Insects in Your Garden](#), by Jessica Walliser (St. Lynn’s Press, 2d ed.).

As a gardener trying to utilize a good IPM program by regularly observing and quickly identifying insects, I use it as my starter “field guide.” This small portable book has laminated card stock, so if I get it dirty in the garden, it washes off easily. With color photographs covering 24 destructive pests and 14 powerful beneficial insects, it provides quick access to methods to control the pests and promote the predators with only organic products. It gives information on live biological controls and preventive actions. It certainly is not as comprehensive as the other two guides listed above but is certainly a great teaching tool for the beginner or a curious youngster.



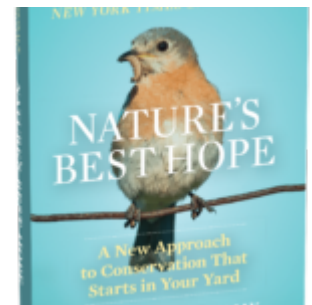
These books will surely convince you to develop a scouting program and become familiar with the IPM practices needed to preserve beneficial insects and promote a more balanced ecosystem. Another great resource is our Virginia Cooperative Extension’s online [Pest Management Guide](#), which is updated every year.

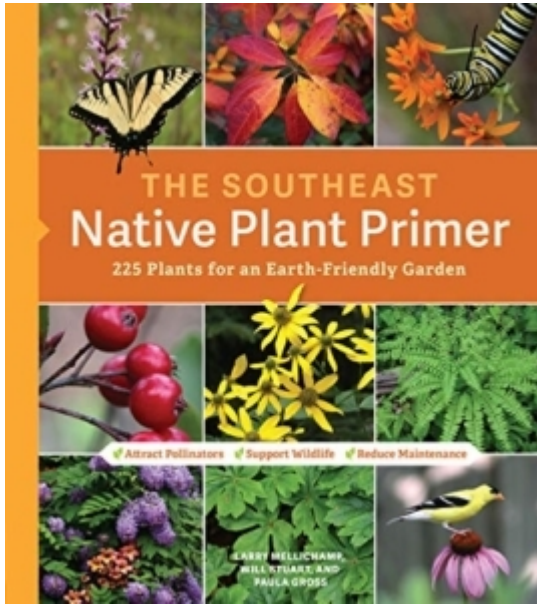
When reading about IPM and cultural practices, you learn that **weeds** can serve as alternate hosts for insects and mite pests, as well as for plant-disease-causing organisms. This reminds me of another favorite and regularly used book, [Weeds of the Northeast](#) by Richard H. Uva, Joseph C. Neal and Joseph M. DiTomaso

(Cornell University Press). This user-friendly book identifies 299 common weeds important to the region from southeast Canada to Virginia and west to Wisconsin. Illustrations show vegetative rather than floral characteristics, allowing identification of the weed before it flowers. Sharp color photos show each plant in seed, seedling and mature stages. Each page gives the common and scientific names, general description, propagation/phenology, roots and underground structures, flower and fruit, habitat, distribution, and notes species that look similar. Thorough and well-designed, it is a great reference guide and deserves a place in your library. If I find a new weed, I bring it into the house in a paper towel, and later in the evening, I grab this book (and my glass of wine) and try to identify it so I know how best to manage it.

Managing weeds can be a full-time job, which brings me to another one of my favorite books: [\*How To Eradicate Invasive Plants\*](#), by Teri Dunn Chace (Timber Press). This book will help you identify over 200 invasive plants of all kinds that can “out-compete” our native plants and threaten our biodiversity. The first two chapters give a broad introduction to invasive plants and general information on controls. The remaining part of the book is divided into sections according to plant type: vines, trees, shrubs, grasses, etc. Each section is organized alphabetically, using the plants’ scientific and common names, including good photos. I love that each “fact” page describes the origin of the plant, reproduction, specific problems and noninvasive alternatives. The author offers chemical as well as less toxic controls. It is an easy-to-use resource that gardeners will find helpful in identifying your invasive plants.

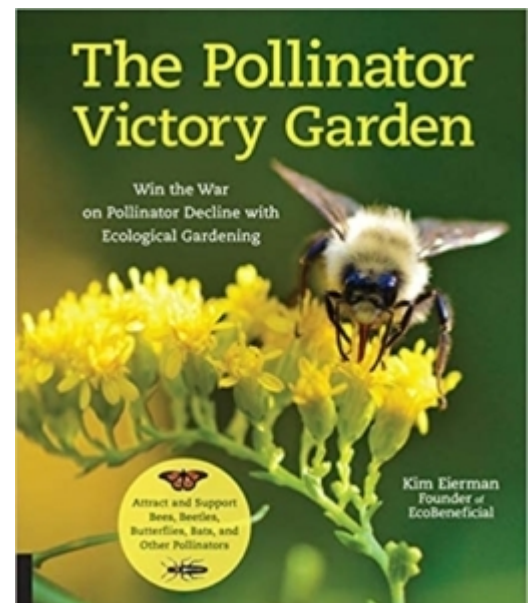
After reading about invasive plants, which choke out our native plants, you’ll be inspired to read more about the role of native plants. I’d suggest some fairly new books that are great resources to help turn our home landscapes into healthy habitats for pollinators and wildlife while preserving our local ecosystems and promoting biodiversity. Doug Tallamy’s latest book, [\*Natures Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard\*](#) (Timber Press), is essential for anyone interested in increasing biodiversity in our landscapes. Tallamy addresses the issue of habitat fragmentation and decline in wildlife species. This is a fascinating read on the ecological interaction between plants, wildlife, and the food web. The author provides a compelling argument for the use of native plants in gardens and landscapes as a means to build ecologically-enriched landscapes and to sustain local biodiversity. He explains why exotic plants can hinder and confuse native creatures. The concept Tallamy calls the “Homegrown National Park” is one that can be created by each of us in our own backyards. He calls for us to shrink our lawns and plant more “keystone” plants — those which form the backbone of local ecosystems by producing food that feeds insects. Examples include oak, cherry, willow, birch, cottonwood, and elm trees, along with goldenrods, asters, and sunflowers. This is an inspirational and motivating book that everyone should read and gift to friends!



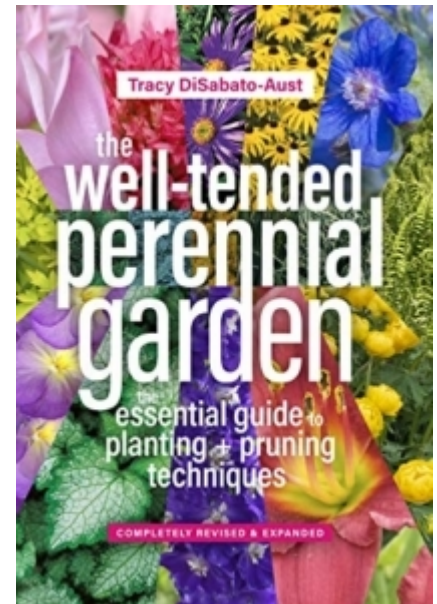


A great read and resource on native plants for our area is [\*The Southeast Native Plant Primer: 225 Plants for an Earth-Friendly Garden\*](#) by Larry Mellichamp and Paula Gross (Timber Press). These authors provide lots of general information on how to select and use native plants which will help provide the basic habitat needs for a variety of species if we plant the right plant in the right place. This book is divided into seven chapters: grasses, wildflowers, vines, sun-loving perennials, shrubs, and trees. Each chapter introduces a plant group followed by individual native plant profiles, including the typical habitat, season of interest, and size at maturity. At a glance, I can quickly see that the sensitive fern is not going to be happy in dry shade as it likes moisture. The book is filled with beautiful photos. This is a must-have book and makes a great useful gift!

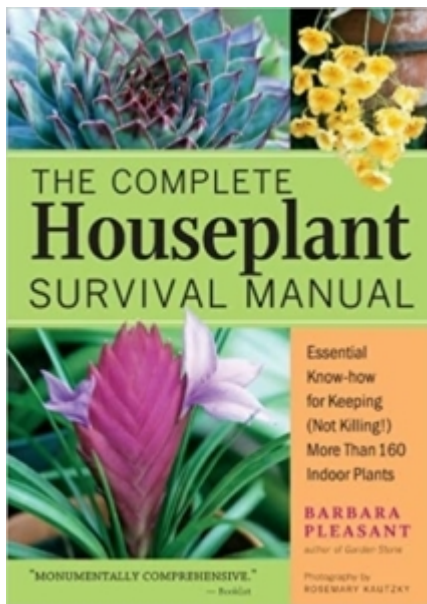
[\*The Pollinator Victory Garden\*](#) by Kim Eierman (Quarto Books) is an excellent resource to help turn your landscape into a pollinator-friendly habitat. We know pollinators are critical to our food supply and are in decline. Victory Gardens from WWII were planted to save money and help feed the country; this book urges folks to plant gardens to help save the pollinators. It will help you to create a pollinator haven by establishing habitat that includes food, larval hosts, and places for laying eggs, nesting and sheltering overwinter. You will also find ideas for pollinator islands, enriched landscape edges, revamped foundation planting, meadowscapes and more. There are lots of lists of what to plant and which pollinators benefit, plus great color photos. This book teaches us how every yard, patio, porch, rooftop, community garden, commercial site, and municipal landscape can help reverse pollinator decline by selecting plants for our geographical region that bloom throughout the year. It is all about the process and importance of eco-friendly gardening for pollinators!



[The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: The Essential Guide to Planting and Pruning Techniques by Tracy DiSabato-Aust 2017](#) (Timber Press) is another information-packed and inspiring book. This classic has been updated and expanded the 1998 original edition with 50 new plant entries. The first third of this book addresses plants and garden design from a maintenance perspective. What is the care and pruning need of these plants? Which cultivars are the best? We all desire to grow dynamic, yet low-maintenance plants that are deer resistant and drought tolerant! The author reviews these concerns and provides many sound horticulture practices, including pest and disease prevention. The last two-thirds of this book is an encyclopedia of perennials with a brief description for each plant followed by pruning and other maintenance information. At the end, there are numerous lists that can serve as a quick reference on many of the maintenance requirements. For example, which plants need to be divided every year or every 10 years? You'll easily find answers to this and other questions here..



As a gardener and plant lover, I also want to make the case for houseplants. Studies indicate that houseplants make us happier, purify the air, lift our moods, and can reduce our stress levels. We have every reason to fill our homes with wonderful, happiness-inducing plants of every shape, size, and color. Houseplants can be a part of your interior design and create a more pleasing atmosphere within your home. It is helpful to have a good resource book.



[The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual by Barbara Pleasant](#) (Storey Publishing) provides, as its subtitle indicates, “Essential Know-how for Keeping (Not Killing!) More Than 160 Indoor Plants”. The book meets the needs of both newbies and experienced houseplant growers. The book is divided into three main parts - a directory for foliage houseplants, another for blooming houseplants, and a section on houseplant care. Within each directory, groups of closely-related plants are discussed together, along with the whys and hows of caring for these plants. Part three of the book covers general information on houseplant care and will help you acquire the practical knowledge of how plants grow to change your brown thumb into a green one.

I hope you will find this list of gardening books helpful for yourself and for “gifting” to your family and friends. These books can teach you everything you need to know to understand and master multiple gardening principles and techniques. You will enjoy growing all kinds of beautiful plants in both outdoor and indoor spaces. Growing by trial and error is all well and good, but with these reference books, you can devote your time to creating a thriving, Earth-friendly garden instead. Enjoy!



# Upcoming Events

By Susan Martin | December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12

## **LEWIS GINTER BOTANICAL GARDEN**

### **DOMINION ENERGY GARDENFEST OF LIGHTS**

**November 23, 2020 - January 10, 2021 (Closed Thanksgiving, December 24-25)**

**Nightly 4:00 - 10:00 PM**

A favorite tradition featuring lights, decorations, outdoor model trains, dinners, hot chocolate (for purchase) & more! All displays are outdoors with safety measures in place. **All tickets must be purchased online in advance.** See this [link](#) for information on Covid restrictions and for purchasing tickets.

## **RIVANNA CHAPTER, VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALIST**

### **2021 Training Class Registration Is Open**

**Tuesdays, February 2 - May 18, 6:30 PM, via ZOOM**

**Deadline for Applications: January 5**

To learn about the 2021 training class, and how to become a certified Master Naturalist, please watch [“Introducing the Rivanna Master Naturalist Program.”](#)

After either watching the 10 minute “Introducing” presentation, or reading the [Information Flier](#), consider joining us for LIVE ZOOM introductory sessions on:

**Saturday, December 5, 10:00 AM**

**Tuesday, December 15, 7:00 PM**

You must register before the session at [rivannamnapplcations@gmail.com](mailto:rivannamnapplcations@gmail.com)

to receive the Zoom registration. See this [link](#) for information on the program, and for registration instructions. QUESTIONS? Call Ida Swenson at 434-996-8405 or email [idthefriz@gmail.com](mailto:idthefriz@gmail.com)

## **UVA OLLI GARDENING-RELATED CLASSES**

**(Osher Lifelong Learning Institute)**

**University-level Short Courses and Classes for Seniors**

**Upcoming 2021 Spring Semester Catalogue**

Look for soon-to-be-announced, gardening-related classes as part of the Spring 2021 course offering. You will be able to purchase a Spring OLLI membership online beginning on Friday, **January 8**. A membership fee of \$75 per semester entitles you to register for courses offered in that semester. Additional fees for courses are listed in the catalogue. **Registration for spring courses begins Tuesday, January 19 at 10:00 AM.** Popular courses fill up fast, and you are advised by OLLI to sign up online as soon as possible after registration opens. See when the 2021 Spring Brochure is available by checking this [link](#).

## **THE NATURE FOUNDATION AT WINTERGREEN**

**Living With Nature at Wintergreen Hike**

**Saturday, December 12**

**1:00 PM**

Join a Foundation Naturalist for an interpretive hike and explore Wintergreen’s natural environment. These hikes are rated moderate. Payment is due before event. Members are free: the non-member fee is \$8. For event information, meeting place directions, and Covid guidelines, see this [link](#). For registration, see this

[link.](#)

## **MCINTIRE BOTANICAL GARDEN**

### **Guardian Garden Work Days**

**Wednesday, December 2 and Sunday, December 16**

**10:00 AM - Noon (Rain cancels)**

**Garden Guardians** provide light maintenance around the garden. Volunteer numbers are limited so as to meet Covid physical distancing guidelines. Please let us know if you will be joining us by emailing the [Volunteer Coordinator](#) and indicate which day(s) you would like to attend. See this [link](#) for more information.

## **NDAL - NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE**

**Founded in 1990 by Larry Weaner**

**An Educational Series Dedicated to the Art and Science of Natural Landscape Design**

**Virtual 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Ecological Landscape Symposium**

**“Guiding Theory into Reality: It Don’t Mean a Thing if the Landscape Don’t Sing”**

Cosponsored by New Directions in the American Landscape, Morris Arboretum of the University of PA, and Connecticut College Arboretum:

**January 21 & 22, 2021 | 1:00 - 4:30 PM EST\***

**January 28 & 29, 2021 | 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM EST\***

\*All four dates are distinct programs with different speakers - register for the full bundle or individual days.

Incorporating science into landscape design benefits both the people and the animals who share the landscape. In this virtual symposium, we will explore how scientific research can lead to tangible approaches for a new landscape tradition, one where ecological, anthropological, and sociological considerations expand the scope of landscape design. See this [link](#) for more information and to register.

## **VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION VIDEO LIBRARY**

VCE offers a **variety of videos** on topics geared to both beginner and more advanced gardeners. Examples of topics include:

Small Fruits in the Home Garden

Firewise Landscaping

Succulent Propagation and Care

Boxwood Blight: How it Spreads

For these and many more videos that address specific topics or those of more general interest, see this [link](#).

# Edible Gardening in December

By Ralph Morini | December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12



If you have been keeping up with garden tasks, your beds are cleaned up, maybe you have cover crops growing or have the beds mulched, and you have your winter hardy vegetables protected with row covers or a cold frame. Now you can relax and start thinking about next year.

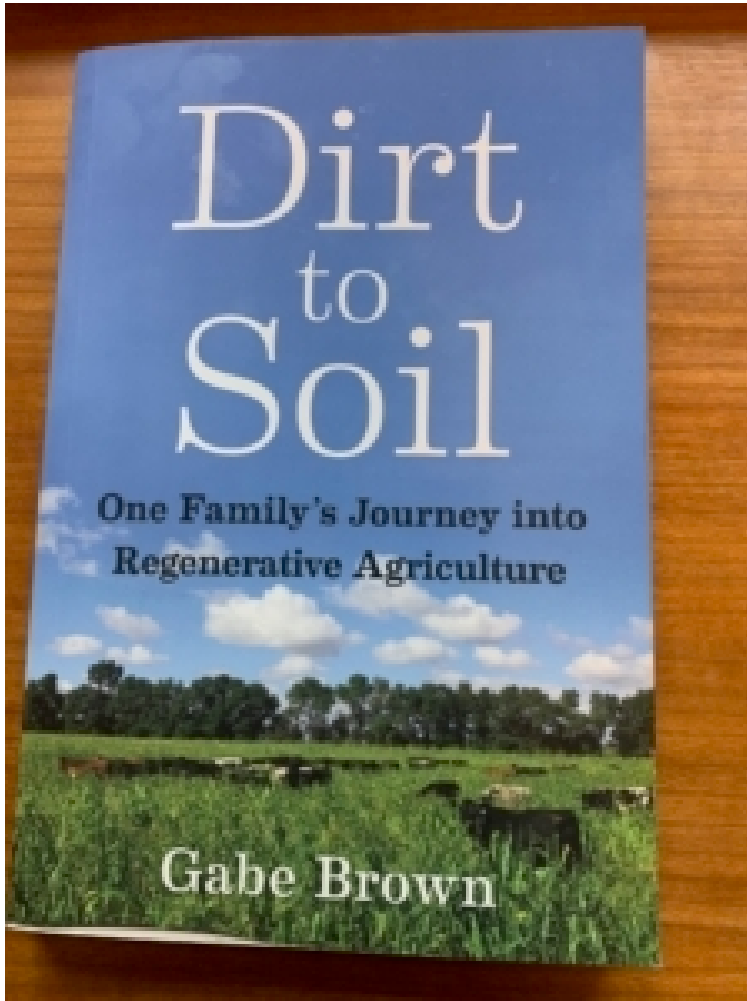
## Form a Soil Building Plan

I've been doing some reading this year on developments in non-chemical farming techniques. It seems clear that conventional farming, with its dependence on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, is steadily depleting soils, damaging bio-diversity, and possibly even damaging human health. Clearly, it needs to evolve. The organic farming movement sets a high bar for a healthier approach but is hard to scale up to the size of our large mechanized farms.

The Regenerative Farming movement may provide an answer. Regenerative farming focuses on natural soil building and minimal chemical use. It has proven successful, even on farms of thousands of acres, where farmers have had the motivation and courage to make the change. The key principles regenerative agriculture espouses are:

- Limit soil disturbance, minimize tillage
- Protect the soil surface
- Build diversity through crop rotation and mixed cover crops
- Keep living roots in the soil as much as possible
- Integrate animals into the system or add organic matter regularly.

These practices are adaptable for home gardeners. They focus on building healthy soil as the basis for growing healthy crops, rather than feeding plants and killing pests with chemicals.



*Dirt to Soil by Gabe Brown*

A book I recently read that is both engaging and convincing is “Dirt to Soil” by Gabe Brown. There are many other good books available that offer good advice for both home gardens and big agriculture to address issues that threaten our food supply and environment. Learning how to execute these techniques and developing a plan for your gardens is definitely a worthwhile winter pursuit. Other helpful information, including video material, is available on the Soil and Cover Crops page of the [VA Cooperative Extension website](#).

### **Other December Tasks**

- As long as your soil isn't frozen, it is still okay to plant garlic and shallots in December. Mulch them well to manage temperature and moisture.



*Open row cover. Photo: Ralph Morini*

- Placing row covers over winter hardy vegetables adds several degrees to the temperature under the cover and protects plants in the event of extreme cold while encouraging continued growth into the winter. For tips on constructing simple hoop style row covers, consult *The Garden Shed* article [Row Covers: A Season Extender with Benefits](#).



Leaf storage: Photo: Ralph Morini

- Put your leaves to good use. Chopping or shredding them is a good idea to help speed decomposition, but they can be used in any form as a winter mulch for garden beds, then removed in the spring for composting. Or they can be used to set up new compost batches now, with winter-generated kitchen plant scraps added as they become available. When spring temperatures rise enough to start serious microbial decomposition, the batch's carbon-to-nitrogen ratio can be fine-tuned. With good moisture and aeration management, you should have compost for use prior to planting summer vegetables. Leaves also provide excellent cover for over-wintering beneficial insects that will help build a natural pest management system in your gardens next year.
- Be sure to drain your hoses. Disconnect them from faucets and lay them out on the ground, both ends open, to let them drain. Then roll them up for winter storage.
- If you have rain barrels, drain them as dry as possible and redirect your downspouts to ground, rather than refilling the barrels during the cold months.
- December brings the first new catalogs and communication from seed suppliers for next season's supplies. It is fun to browse them, looking for new items to grow and assessing different varieties that may help avoid disease problems that affected last year's selections. Pay attention to "time to harvest" and "disease resistance" data. For help interpreting seed catalog and seed pack information, check out the article [Using Seed Pack Information to Help Your Garden Grow](#) from the February 2018 issue of *The Garden Shed*.
- Make a first pass at laying out your crop arrangement for next year. Remember to rotate specific plants to different parts of the garden, preferably on a 3-4 year cycle. The benefits are both disease and pest reduction and soil enrichment through plant diversity.
- Take care of your tools. Winter is the time to clean, disinfect, sharpen, and generally prepare them for the work ahead. Also a good time to clean pots and flats if you have a warm enough place to do the wet work. Come spring, you'll be happy you did it, promise.



*"Indoor Herb Garden" by ReeseCLloyd is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0*

- An enjoyable way to keep your hands in the soil during winter is to grow herbs indoors. You need a sunny window, preferably with a southern exposure. Use a premium potting soil and add nutrient as recommended. It's best to use clean plastic or glazed containers to reduce watering requirements. Be sure the container has drainage holes and use a non-porous dish to catch excess water. Be especially careful to keep the soil surface moist between planting and germination. Herbs do best with temperatures above 65 degrees, the warmer the better. Basil likes temperatures above 70 degrees, so doesn't want to be too close to the window during cold weather. Check out "Be Inspired With Indoor Herb Gardening" in this month's *Garden Shed* for great information on how to enjoy and be successful at growing herbs indoors this winter.

In any case, enjoy your gardening, happy holidays, and I hope to see you next month at *The Garden Shed*.

# Easy Fruit

By Cathy Caldwell | December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12



You decided to start growing your own food. You want to feed yourself and your family with delicious and healthy homegrown produce. And now, you have beds that are filled with amazing greens, beans, squash, tomatoes, peppers, and more. But you are still depending on the grocery for your fruit. After all, we all know it is too difficult to maintain an orchard of fruit trees in a home garden.

Although conventional fruit trees — apples, peaches, pears, and cherries — can be grown on dwarf rootstocks so as to minimize the space and time needed to get fruit, for best results they need to be on a regular spray program to control insects and diseases. They also must be pruned properly to get the best fruit yield. And this can be difficult for the average homeowner. But don't get discouraged.

When my sister was building her new house, she called me to come up with a yard plan that would include fruit trees. I went to take a look and quickly realized the orchard she had in mind really wouldn't work for her or her space. She is not a gardener, and I knew she wasn't going to spend time fussing over any of her plants. Her property also butted up to a river and her soil was often waterlogged. So, I talked her into a few other fruits instead.

We started with a foundation planting of blueberries instead of the traditional evergreens. Blueberries must have a soil pH of 5-6. And they want a very rich, organic soil. But if you get that right before you plant them, they will reward you with years of beautiful fruit. They also have attractive flowers very early in the spring at a time when few other things are blooming. They are pretty throughout the summer and the fall foliage turns a fiery red and purple when the cool weather comes. In fact, the only problem she has with hers are keeping the birds off. So, you might need to cover them with a light cloth or bird netting while they are in fruit. She feeds them each fall with an organic high acid fertilizer and mulches them annually with a couple of inches of leaf compost. They need an inch of water each week during the hot summer months. They should also be pruned every winter to remove several of the oldest branches. But to be honest with you, my sister only prunes when the bushes start to get in the way of the sidewalk next to them.



If your soil pH is too high for blueberries, you might want to try honeyberries as these are a close relative but are more tolerant of growing conditions. The fruit looks like a stretched blueberry and tastes like it was dipped in sugar. They grow about 4-5 feet tall and wide, in full sun, and in a rich, well-drained soil. They need regular watering until they are fully established. But then they can handle droughts with ease. They do need at least 2 varieties for cross pollination.

I talked my sister into underplanting the blueberries with cranberries for a groundcover. I'll admit, it was a bit of an experiment. I wasn't quite sure how it would work. But they have done quite well. Cranberries need more watering to get them established and are pretty cranky about the lack of it. But once they have been in for about 2-3 years, they are far more forgiving of dry times. Other than that, they want the same living conditions as the blues. So, they made a perfect pairing.

We also put in a row of bush cherries. I have tried several that were found in those really cheap plant catalogues and the one I settled on is a cross between *Prunus japonica* and *Prunus jacquemontii* called 'Joel'. This deciduous shrub grows about 4 feet tall and produces delicious tart cherries about a month later than conventional cherries. They are pruned once in a while to remove occasional dieback and to shape them a bit. The only other care they have needed is again to cover them to protect the fruit from the birds. Because, the day those fruit are ripe and ready to eat, the critters will be there stripping the plant an hour before you are. They are also not really prolific so you do need to plant a few more to get a good crop.

Over her back patio, we put in an arbor planted with hardy kiwis. These vines are fast growing and can quickly overcome a weak arbor. So be sure to beef up your structure if you want to grow them. They come in male and female and to get fruit you must include a male to service the girls. Other than that, they only have one little quirk I haven't solved yet. My sister's vines have produced many fruits that are smaller and smooth skinned but still taste like the fuzzy kiwis you buy from the grocery. And they started producing the second year after they were planted. Mine, which have been in for 8 years now, have yet to produce anything. They flower and I have both sexes. The only thing I can figure out is mine are not getting pollinated and hers are. And I have seen them grown in other locations with the same results. Sometimes they fruit. Sometimes they don't.

*It is important to plant blueberries in soil that is rich in organic matter and has a pH of 5-6. If they are happy the leaves will be a rich green color and they will bear large juicy berries year after year. Photo: Mary Stickley-Godinez*

To anchor the beds around the patio, we planted gooseberries because they are smaller — about 3 feet tall and wide. Thus, they provided structure without blocking the view. They do like a bit of protection from afternoon sun but will grow in any soil conditions, and I even have some growing in my yard under walnut trees. They have no other disease or insect problems. The fruit is tart but makes a wonderful cobbler. These actually didn't work in her patio setting. They were in mixed perennial beds and by the third year, we found they had root suckers that were difficult to manage. So, she moved them out to a row in the lawn where they are mowed on each side to keep them contained.



*Gooseberry bush with berries*  
*Photo: Tarquin, CC BY-SA 3.0*

The thorns are the bigger problem for these plants. It is difficult not to become impaled on their spines which are best described as hypodermic needles. The plants also need to be covered to keep the birds out. But the netting becomes hopelessly entangled and you will end up bloodied and cursing when you need to get under there to pick. So put the netting on a frame that will hold it away from the branches.

On the northern side of the house, we planted a large patch of rhubarb. They also want to be planted in a bed heavy in organic material and need regular water to get settled in. But like the other plants, once established, they have done well with little supplementation. Slugs tend to like these, and they need some protection from harsh afternoon sun. But they have made a rich lush ground cover and the bright red stems and veins provide plenty of color in the bed all summer long. The stems, which can actually be picked all season long, make delicious pies and chutney.



*Aronia berries, or Chokeberries, are a native plant that produces clusters of strong bitter berries which are packed with nutrients and antioxidants. Photo: Mary Stickley-Godinez*

And I would be remiss to fail mentioning two of our native shrubs. Because she lived beside a stream, she had the perfect location for aronias and elderberries. These are both beautiful large shrubs (6-8 feet) that prefer a moist site and naturally grow in marshy areas and streambanks. However, if your site is dry, the aronias will take that as well. Both aronias and elderberries produce purple berries that are packed full of antioxidants and nutrients. With very few insect or disease problems, they were a no brainer for her yard.

My sister doesn't have an orchard of fruit trees like we grew up with. But she does have a beautiful yard of easy, low maintenance fruits that she can manage with little trouble. And her family, friends, and neighbors have enjoyed a bounty of jams, jellies, chutneys, pies, and cobblers made of healthy homegrown fruits.

#### RESOURCES:

Featured Photo: Gooseberries by Wolfgang Eckert, courtesy of Pixabay

[Blueberry Cultivation in the Home Garden/The Garden Shed/Apr.2019](#)

[Specialty Crop Profile: Ribes \(Currants and Gooseberries\)"/Va.Coop.Ext. Pub.438-107](#) (includes recommended cultivars and nurseries).

[Minor Fruits: Gooseberries and Currants/Cornell Univ. Horticulture](#)

[Hardy Kiwi in the Home Fruit Planting/Penn St.Ext.](#)

[Exciting Plants: Actinidia arguta/Successful Gardening Through Extension, Va.Coop.Ext.Culpepper](#) (page 5, hardy kiwi)

[Hardy Kiwi Video/Edible Landscaping](#) (featuring a kiwi-covered pergola as well as pruning advice)

[Aronias: Native Shrubs for Fall Color/The Garden Shed/ Nov.2019](#)

# December Tips for the Ornamental Gardener

By Cathy Caldwell | December 2020-Vol.6 No. 12



This month's To-Do List is pretty short. Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to make sure your plants are prepared for winter. And we're not simply talking about cold weather. These days, our plants are subject to more temperature fluctuation than in the past, and these sudden changes in temperature can be just as damaging as severe cold.

Those old standbys — **mulch and proper watering** — are just what's needed to prepare our plants for the ups and downs of winter. If we have a dry period before winter begins in earnest, water your more vulnerable plants, making sure to soak the soil several inches deep. Mulch with wood chips, leaf mold, or similar materials. A mulch protects by preventing rapid temperature change at the soil surface, deep penetration of frost, and excessive loss of surface water. Conserving soil moisture now can help prevent winter desiccation later.

**Evergreen shrubs and trees are susceptible to damage from heavy snow and ice.** Remember that white stuff that used to float down from the sky? Despite our changing climate, snow and ice are still a possibility. If winter precipitation is in the weather forecast, you may want to provide some protection, especially for the evergreens most prone to damage, including arborvitae, boxwood, cedars and junipers, hollies, leyland cypress, and evergreen magnolias. Heavy snow and ice storms cause damage by bending and breaking branches.

### **Snow Removal Advice**

As I learned the hard way, there's a correct way to remove snow from heavy-laden branches. I have a severely damaged boxwood as proof. If only I'd received this helpful tidbit in time: "Two causes of damage by snow and ice are **weight** and **careless snow removal.**" Relf and Appleton, "Managing Winter Injury to Trees and Shrubs," [Va.Coop.Ext.Pub. 426-500](#). Some experts in colder regions recommend dusting snow off shrubs even while it is still falling. That's probably not necessary in our area, but if a large load of snow is collecting on your shrubs, you may want to remove it, especially if more freezing weather or wind is predicted. Some experts advise **against** removing snow or ice, but if it seems called for, you should remove it *gently* with a broom. Shaking is not recommended. Always sweep upward with the broom to lift snow off. When the branches are frozen and brittle, avoid disturbing them. Wait until a warmer day or until ice naturally melts away.

### **Advance Preparations**

You can protect smaller upright evergreens such as arborvitae and juniper by wrapping or tying together the branches, and circling the plant with a soft cord, twine, or fabric strips, up to about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way to the top. Pulling the branches together and **securing them in an upright position** can reduce the weight of the snow or ice. A slightly different version of this wrapping technique is used on vulnerable shrubs.

Boxwoods and similar evergreen shrubs may be protected against snow damage by wrapping the outer branches with twine, cord, or strips of burlap. Start by tying the cord securely to a low branch, and then wrap the cord so as to create an upward spiral around the outside of the bush, spacing the cords 8 to 10 inches apart. The goal is to prevent heavy piles of snow on the branch tips, so you want the cord tight enough to prevent breakage from excess weight



*A blue spruce is tied to protect against branch breakage by heavy snow and ice. Photo courtesy of Johnson County Kansas State Research & Extension.*

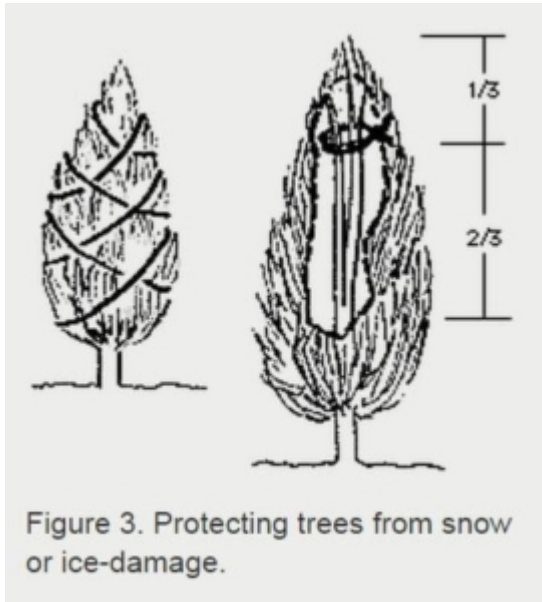


Diagram courtesy of Univ. Minnesota Extension and N.C. State Extension.

of snow or ice, but not tight enough to exclude air circulation around the plant.

For more about protecting boxwoods in winter, read [Boxwood in the Landscape/Winter Damage or Injury](#). Va. Coop. Ext. Pub. 426-603.

You can leave the restraints in place until all ice has melted. There is no harm in leaving it on longer, however, for protection in case of another storm, but make sure the twine is removed before new growth begins in the spring.

The branches of **deciduous trees** can also be damaged by heavy snow and ice. Be sure to remove heavy snow **gently**, as improper removal might increase damage. **Do not try to remove ice from branches** as that can also cause additional damage; allow ice to melt off naturally.

### Making Your List, Checking It Twice

If you're thinking about giving a **hydroponics system** as a holiday gift, you'll probably want to learn more about them.

Here's a source worth reading: [Hydroponics for the Holidays? Home Systems are a hot holiday gift list item/ The Garden Professors](#).



*Homemade holiday centerpiece.*

*Photo: Cathy Caldwell*

If you're planning to **make a wreath or centerpiece** with the greenery in your own yard, you'll find lots of advice on that topic, as well as on the subject of Christmas trees, both living and cut, in [Holiday Decorating with Fresh Greenery, The Garden Shed/Dec.20 15.](#)

**The Last Word** is a very important tidbit from that article: **To prevent spreading boxwood blight** unintentionally, either burn or bag up and dispose of all boxwood trimmings. To stay up to date on boxwood blight, start with the [Boxwood Blight Task Force](#), which contains links to multiple articles and resources.

#### RESOURCES:

[Protecting Evergreens From Ice and Snow, Clemson Coop.Ext.](#)

[Helping Evergreens Recover from Heavy Snow/Kansas St.Ext.](#)

[Winter Injury to Trees and Shrubs/Morton Arboretum](#)

[Winter Damage on Landscape Plants, Univ. of Maryland Ext.](#)

[How do I protect my trees and shrubs from winter damage?](#)

[Univ.N.H.Ext.](#)

[Prepare Your Landscape for Snow/NC Coop.Ext.](#)