

January 2023 Horticultural Hints



Start your year off clean, Use these days to clean your tools and prepare them for spring gardening. Clean tools to remove dirt and any lingering chemicals. Sharpen your pruners, loppers, shovels, spades and mower blades. Don't know how to sharpen? Go to your favorite nursery where the staff can show you how, or check online for detailed videos that show you how to sharpen any blade. When finished sharpening, use a clean rag to put a thin coating of oil on each blade. If your tools live in an unheated garage or tool shed, this will prevent moisture from rusting the metal.



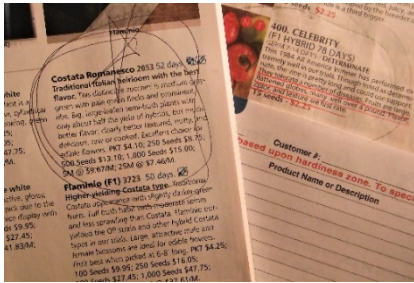
Start your year off green. Do you have leftover chemicals – pesticides, herbicides or fungicides hanging around your garage, garden shed or basement? These are serious poisons that must be disposed of properly. Contact your local Department of Sanitation or Public Works for the next chemical disposal day. And this year, use lawn and garden chemicals only when, and where, absolutely necessary to control specific pests and diseases.



Pray for snow! This has been a largely snow-free winter for southern New England. Of course, you have added leaves around new plantings to protect them from sub-freezing temperatures and frost heaves, but now it's time to look for more help from Mother Nature. Snow is a natural insulator and a very efficient one—ten inches of snow provide the same insulation as six inches of fiberglass. Snow keeps roots happily buried, not subject to freeze and thaw cycles.



Skip the salt. Once the snow arrives, avoid using salt on sidewalks and driveways. Sand or kitty litter will provide traction and even assist in melting as it warms on sunny days. Best of all, there will be no damage to your plants now, or when the ground thaws in the spring. The sand or litter will disappear into the garden soil without damaging to roots or poisoning the soil.



Time to get serious with the seed catalogs. Make a list of the species you want to grow from seed and then look over the available varieties. Careful reading will tell you which offer the greatest yield, the best flavor, the most disease resistance, and then you decide which ones best fit your needs. If you didn't receive a printed catalog, most seed companies offer an on line version as well as order forms.



Be kind to your houseplants. Winter may be cold and dry for outdoor plants, but our indoor plants suffer from hot and dry. With the thermostat set at 68 or 72 degrees, you are drying out the air as you warm it. Place plants on a tray covered with pebbles where you regularly add water. As the water evaporates, your plant breathe easier. Plants too big to be gathered together? Add pebbles and water into large saucers under each individual. Additional humidity in the house is also a benefit to you. Plants also need regular watering, but less than in other seasons. Unless you are using grow lights, your plants will respond to the reduced light by slowing down their growth which also eliminates the need for fertilizing.



Be kind to the birds. Not only do birds enliven your garden, they are your friends. Birds eat caterpillars all spring and summer. So, during the coldest months when much of their food has disappeared or is buried under snow, put out seed and suet feeders. They'll you and pay back your kindness come spring.



Where will you travel this year? With Covid travel restrictions finally in the rear-view mirror, you're likely thinking 'travel' this summer. Wherever you go, be certain you search for and include open gardens to provide inspiration. Look for botanical and public gardens, local garden club tours, and Garden Conservancy Open Days for special private gardens.

