About a week after Thanksgiving I was looking out my kitchen window and saw some dark-eyed Juncos under the tree in our backyard. Unfortunately at that time, I had not put my feeders up yet, so there was no food for them to eat. That evening after I had picked the kids up from preschool/daycare we made a stop at a local garden center. Justin, my three year-old, said “mommy what are we doing”, and I said “we are here to buy some bird food so we can feed the birds”. Both baby Jason and Justin somehow always manage to get involved in whatever I have an interest in at the time. Last summer it was digging potatoes and picking vegetables, in the fall it was pumpkin pancakes, and pumpkin blizzards, now it’s the birds. So, we go in the store and Justin looks over the seed with me and we pick out the kind of seed we want and checkout. A couple of days later I got around to cleaning and filling the feeder, and the birds came back. We have several round arborvitae shrubs in our backyard which make great cover for the birds. Now each morning, while we are eating breakfast we look out the window or sliding glass door to the deck, and check out which birds are feeding in the backyard.

Birds have four basic needs: food, water, shelter from predators and the elements, and safe nesting places. In addition to setting out feeders to provide food, you can help birds meet their needs in the following ways: as you clean up, leave a brush pile that birds can use for cover. Also leave seeds and fruits on plants such as sunflowers (for jays and chickadees); cosmos, chicory and evening primrose (for goldfinches); and grapes (for cedar waxwings). Provide fresh water in a shallow container. Water should be no more than two inches deep. In winter, it is especially important to keep the water ice-free by changing it frequently or by using an immersion-type water heater designed for outdoor use.

Birds probably depend on your feeder most during weather extremes, especially when snow or ice covers natural foods, and during late winter and early spring when less food is available. During cold weather extremes, birds such as chickadees have had higher survival rates when supplemental food is made available. Ideally, it is also best to continue a winter feeding program up until May when new foods become available. Seeds are the food most commonly eaten by birds during the winter months. When choosing seeds, think about the birds that interest you and the types of seeds that attract them. Small black oil-sunflower seeds are overall the most widely preferred bird seed. They have a high energy content, and the thin shells allow easy use by smaller birds such as chickadees, juncos and native sparrows, as well
as cardinals, mourning doves, grosbeaks, and others. White proso millet is another attractive seed used especially by smaller birds, and a small amount of cracked corn is good in a mix. Try to place feeders so that birds have protection from winds and predators and so that they will avoid window collisions. A good spot to place a feeder is in a somewhat open area but within about ten feet of cover, such as bushes or trees.

Landscapes with abundant trees and shrubs, and a relatively small lawn, are most attractive to birds. To enhance your garden with plants that provide natural food and shelter, develop a landscape plan this winter in preparation for spring planting.

### Diagnosing Houseplant Problems

During the winter months you may have some problems with your houseplants like browning of the leaves or tips, insects, root rot, among others. It is important to catch the problem early and treat it. Below are some symptoms and causes of several cultural problems.

Problems resulting from poor growing conditions in the home are difficult to diagnose. Often poor growth results from a combination of several unfavorable factors. The following describes symptoms and causes of several cultural problems.

#### Lower leaves turn yellow and drop when touched

- Usually caused by overwatering
- May occur when a new plant is moved from a greenhouse to a low-light, low-humidity environment

#### Yellowing and dropping of leaves at various levels on a plant

- Overwatering
- Tight soil
- Gas fumes

#### Tips or margins of leaves appear burned, brown or both

- Too much fertilizer
- Plant too dry for a short period of time
- Plant exposed to too low temperature for short period

#### Use of softened water

- New leaves are small
- Poorly drained soil
- New leaves with long internodes
- Not enough light
- Temperature too high

#### Leaves yellow or light green, weak growth

- Too much light
- Poor root system — possibly from poor drainage, overwatering or tight soil.

Source: G6510-Caring for Houseplants, Revised by David H. Trinklein, Division of Plant Sciences

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**STATE-BY-STATE GARDENING MAGAZINE ANNOUNCES PUBLICATION OF MISSOURI GARDENER MAGAZINE**

RUSTON, Louisiana (November 30, 2010) – State-by-State Gardening Magazines has launched a new gardening magazine specifically for Missouri. The inaugural issue of Missouri Gardener, a four-color, glossy magazine, will offer localized gardening advice and will hit newsstands and be sent to subscribers beginning in January 2011. Missouri Gardener will be published six times a year and provide localized gardening advice, step-by-step how-to stories for the hands-on gardener, beautiful color photography, and great solutions for tough gardening problems. Each issue will feature: Region Reports, localized advice on what to do in your region of Missouri each month; hot plants, popular plants for Missouri landscapes; calendar of events, information on Missouri’s premier gardening shows and events; Ask the Expert, where gardening questions are answered by local experts; garden profiles, featuring an outstanding Missouri garden; and feature stories.

“Missouri has a great gardening tradition and we are excited to become a part of it by offering Missouri home-gardening enthusiasts the latest information from local and regional experts,” said Steve Giddings, publisher. Home subscriptions to Missouri Gardener are available for $19.95 for a year (six issues). All subscribers also receive a free State-by-State Gardening Discount Card, which is good for 10 percent off at locally owned garden centers and nurseries throughout the state (a list of who honors the discount card will be available in each issue of the magazine and on the website). To subscribe to Missouri Gardener, call toll free 888-265-3600 or go online at mogardener.com.
CARING FOR HOUSEPLANTS

This time of year when the snow is falling and it's too cold to garden outdoors, your attention may turn to your houseplants. To many people, a home is not complete without attractive potted plants. Proper care of houseplants helps increase satisfaction and enjoyment from them and extends the blooming period of many flowering plants.

Maybe you are like me and many other gardeners that I know, that try to save outside containers of annuals. I drug plants in and out of the garage during October and November trying to save them from the cold. I finally had to bring them indoors, and realized that some annuals are just better off pitched and new ones bought the next spring. I even pitched two poinsettias that I had for the past 2-3 years. I realized with them too, that it’s just easier to buy new ones each year. But, I get attached to some of the plants and have a hard time letting them go.

Do you ever find yourself rearranging your houseplants? The first week of December I decided I was going to rearrange the houseplants while Jason was taking a nap. I moved a large Benjamin Fig tree into a corner of the kitchen because I thought it would give the kitchen some more “color”. Well, it is still there, but it wasn’t such a good idea. Baby Jason loves to play in the dirt and pick up the leaves that have fallen and put them in his mouth. It will probably stay there for the winter, but in the spring it’s being moved out.

Houseplants are probably killed or injured more often by improper watering than by any other single factor. No general schedule can be used for watering all houseplants. Size of plant, pot, light, temperature, humidity and other conditions influence the speed with which the soil mass dries out. In general, flowering plants need more water than foliage plants of the same size. Never water any plant unless it needs it. Soil kept either too wet or too dry causes plant roots to die, which leads to poor growth or death of the plant. Never allow plants to wilt, and never allow them to stand in water for long periods of time. Learn to gauge the moisture content of the soil by its color and feel. As the soil surface dries, it becomes lighter. Soil kept too moist becomes sticky and slimy, thus inviting root rots and other disease problems. Potted plants should always have good drainage. Improper light intensity ranks close to improper watering as a frequent cause for failure with houseplants. A plant in proper light is better able to withstand the high temperature and low humidity of many homes. The amount of light necessary for good growth varies with different types of plants.

Proper temperatures for plants are often hard to find in the house. A hot, dry atmosphere shortens the life of flowers. Flowering potted plants do best in temperatures of 65 to 75 degrees F during the day and 55 to 60 degrees F at night. To extend the bloom of flowering potted plants in the home, move them to a cool spot at night. Foliage plants are more tolerant of high temperatures, but they thrive at temperatures between 65 and 70 degrees F.

Fertilizing once a month is adequate for most houseplants that are producing new growth or flowers. However, plants do not need fertilizer in winter when no new growth is apparent. Do not use fertilizer to stimulate new growth on a plant located in poor growing conditions. Lack of growth is often due to improper light or watering than to nutritional deficiencies. In such cases, adding fertilizer may actually cause additional injury. Drop of lower leaves, overall yellow-green color or weak growth may indicate a need for fertilization. However, these same symptoms may result from poor light or over-watering, so evaluate all conditions before fertilizing more than normal.

Now is a good time to repot any houseplants with roots coming out of the drainage holes. Choose a pot one size larger than the current pot, remove the plant, prune off any roots that might need trimmed, and repot using fresh potting soil.

Watch new plants carefully for development of insect or disease problems. If detected early, these problems often can be corrected easily before serious damage is done. If undetected or ignored, they may become difficult to control. The three most common and difficult houseplant pests are spider mites, scales and mealy bugs. SOURCE: G6510-Caring for Houseplants, Revised by David H. Trinklein, Division of Plant Sciences
**GARDEN TIPS FOR JANUARY**

**ORNAMENTALS:**
- Brush off heavy snow from trees and shrubs
- To reduce injury, allow ice to melt naturally from plants.
- Check stored summer bulbs such as Dahlias, Canna’s, and Gladiolus to be sure they are not rotting or drying out.
- Limbs damaged by ice or snow should be pruned off promptly to prevent bark from tearing.
- Sow pansy seeds indoors.

**HOUSEPLANTS:**
- Wash dust off plant leaves on a regular basis. This allows the leaves to gather light more efficiently and will result in better growth.
- Set pots of humidity-loving house plants on trays filled with pebbles and water.
- Kill mealy bugs on plants by wiping them off with a cotton ball soaked in rubbing alcohol.
- Insecticidal soap sprays can be safely applied to most house plants for the control of many insect pests.
- To clean heavily encrusted clay pots, scrub them with a steel wool pad after they have soaked overnight in a solution consisting of 1 gallon of water, and one cup each of white vinegar and household bleach.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**
- **All Month**
  - Store wood ashes in sealed, fireproof containers. Apply a dusting around lilacs, baby’s breath, asters, lilies, and roses in spring. Do not apply to acid-loving plants. Excess ashes may be composted.
  - Check fruit trees for evidence of rodent injury to bark.
  - Avoid foot traffic on frozen lawns as this may injure turf grasses.
- **Week 1-2**
  - Christmas tree boughs can be used to mulch garden perennials.
  - If you didn’t get your bulbs planted before the ground froze, plant them immediately in individual peat pots and place the pots in flats. Set them outside where it is cold and bury the bulbs under thick blankets of leaves. Transplant them into the garden any time weather permits.
  - Seed and nursery catalogs arrive. While reviewing garden catalogs, look for plants with improved insect, disease, and drought-tolerance.
  - Old Christmas trees can be recycled outdoors as a feeding station for birds. String garlands of peanuts, popcorn, cranberries, and fruits through their boughs.

-Missouri Botanical Garden-

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

- **January 3**: Fabius Master Gardener club meeting, 6:30 pm, Presbyterian Church, Memphis. Program-slide show on flowers.
- **January 4**: Salt River Master Gardener meeting, 7 pm, Palmyra Sesquicentennial Bldg
- **January 6-8**: Great Plains Vegetable Growers Conference, Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO. For more information go to [http://greatplainsgrowers.org](http://greatplainsgrowers.org).
- **January**: No meeting this month for Heartland Master Gardeners in Brookfield.
- **January**: Sullivan County Master Gardener meeting. No info available at this time.
- **January**: Magic City Master Gardener meeting. No info available at this time.
- **January 18**: Kirksville Area Master Gardener meeting, 7 pm.
- **January 21**: Northeast Missouri Farm to School Workshop; Truman State University-SUB, 8:30-4:00; no cost; farmers, K-12 and college food service directors and staff, food distributors, food service management companies, school administrators and board members, parents and students, representatives from hospitals, child/adult care centers, senior centers, and other agencies and institutions are invited to attend. Missouri Farm to School helps connect schools and universities with locally grown food and local farmers. By using more locally grown food in institutions, we can increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables and create new market opportunities for farmers. Lunch provided. Registration required by January 12 by contacting Stacy Colley at 573-882-5114 or colleys@missouri.edu.
- **January 24**: Macon-Shelby Master Gardener meeting.
- **September 23-25**: State Master Gardener Conference, Quality Inn, Hannibal. Theme: Gardening in America’s Hometown.

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**Garden Talk!**

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