WINTER ON THE FARM AND IN THE GARDEN

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! I know I did. It’s so fun having kids and watching them get excited about Christmas. We put up a real tree again this year. It just wouldn’t be Christmas without a live tree. We actually found one in a short period of time this year. This made my husband happy. It was a beautiful scotch pine. I love scotch pine and don’t even want to try another species. I love the scent they provide and the sturdy branches that will hold heavy ornaments.

Are you a person that likes snow? I’m one of those people that likes it for a few days, then I want it to go away. I like playing in it with my kids and sledding, making snow forts and snowmen. I also like the beauty of the landscape covered in snow. Pine trees and other evergreens are pretty with snow on top. But, it is not fun farming in the snow. Milking cows, putting out hay, feeding calves and everything else that goes along with farming in the winter, takes so much longer. When I was a child, I loved to go out with my dad in the snow and put out hay to our dairy heifers. He had alfalfa bales on a flat-bed truck and he would put me up there to throw out the flakes. We would also bed/straw down our loafing shed for the dairy cows. I thought all this was great fun. Now that I’m older I see that doing chores in the snow probably wasn’t fun to my dad. His biggest worries, I’m sure at the time, were that the cows didn’t slip on the ice or slick snow and break a leg.

My chickens don’t like the snow. They won’t leave their coop and step out into their run. Whether you like snow or not, we usually get some in Missouri at some point during the winter. If snow covers your plants, gently remove it from tree and shrub branches. When tree and shrub branches bend under the weight of a new snowfall, use a broom to gently brush it off. Don’t try to remove ice or you might break the branch. It’s possible to save a branch that partially splits from the main trunk if you tie it in place and use long screws (coming from each direction, if necessary) to secure it. If done right away, the tree may callous over the wound and heal itself next season, and not split further.

Protect trees and shrubs located along roadways and driveways from excess road salt, which results in stunted and yellowed foliage, premature autumn leaf coloration, and twig dieback. To protect plants, erect a screen of burlap between plants and the pavement.

To make walks and driveways safe, use sand, sawdust, or kitty litter for a more environmentally friendly alternative to salt for melting snow and
ice. When shoveling snow from walkways and drives, be careful not to pile it near plants or where melting snow will drain. After the snow melts, use fresh water to flush the area around the roots that was exposed to salt.

Many of you may feed birds during the winter months. My boys and I like to put out feed and watch the different birds come to our feeders. We even throw out peanuts for the bluejays. Keep your feeders filled during the winter months and you will attract a variety of birds. 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. 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.

Other winter activities you can do include cleaning, sharpening and oiling your tools. Clean tools will last longer. Take a walk in the woods. See how many trees you can identify by their bark or buds. If you plan to start seeds indoors, sort through last years seed, determine what you need to purchase, and make a trip to the local garden center to pick up the items you need for seed starting. Look through all of the garden catalogs you received in the mail or look online and make decisions on what you would like to purchase for the new growing season. Get your order in early to ensure you get everything you ordered. Sometimes if you wait until spring to make an order, supplies have already sold out.

ARE RAW VEGETABLES HEALTHIER THAN COOKED?

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There is some debate about whether cooked or raw vegetables are better to consume. The short answer is — don't choose, have both!

Cooked: Lycopene content in tomatoes is actually increased when tomatoes are cooked. Lycopene is a phytochemical that is responsible for the red color of the tomato. Studies have linked high lycopene intake with lower risk of cancer and heart attacks. It is a powerful antioxidant. Antioxidants help prevent or repair damage to body cells, which is important for decreasing risk of cancer. They are also thought to improve immune function. Cooking carrots increases the beta carotene content. Beta carotene is an antioxidant that the body converts to vitamin A, also an antioxidant. It also helps promote normal vision, protect from infection and regulate the immune system. There may also be additional antioxidant activity in cooked spinach, mushrooms, asparagus, cabbage and peppers. The cooking method found to be the best for preserving antioxidants was boiling or steaming. Frying is not recommended because the antioxidants get used up in the frying process.

Raw: In other instances, raw vegetables are better. For example, polyphenols, which are also antioxidants, are lost when carrots are cooked. In broccoli, heat damages the enzyme myrosinase. Myrosinase breaks down compounds in the broccoli to form another compound called sulforaphane, which may kill precancerous cells. Vitamin C, also a powerful antioxidant that is found in many of the vegetables mentioned, can be destroyed by heat. To get the best of both worlds, it is recommended to alternate consumption of raw and cooked vegetables to get a variety of nutrients.
OFF-SEASON MUSINGS
By: Master Gardener Sue Limestall

The onset of cold and snowy winter months allows all gardeners the opportunity to plan, dream, and prepare for the coming spring and growing season. What are your musings? Perusing seed catalogs? Evaluating new tool possibilities? Reading gardening magazines to get new ideas? One year ago this gardener decided it was time to change the hardscaping in the backyard. Raised flower, shrub and vegetable beds were framed with disintegrating railroad ties. The main vegetable garden was so large that I was forced to walk in the raised bed to access the planting areas and to harvest the results. And so, my musings began. What would be the best way to improve what I had?

Unlike the flower beds in my front yard that have meandering borders, these beds in the back yard were rectangular which would allow me the option to use square or rectangular stone blocks, or landscape timbers. With tape measure in hand, I started taking measurements to lay out the bed diagrams on graph paper. I started looking at stone block, landscape timber, and cedar board options at local garden supply/ construction centers. I was able to secure stone block samples from a local landscaping services company, and gazed at them for two weeks, all lined up at the garden edge.

Soon it was March 1st, and the time for decisions was at hand. The order for the blocks (432, 25-pound blocks!) was made; a list of other supplies needed was assembled. The plan for the order of the various project components was set. Step one of the actual physical work? Removing railroad ties from the first area that I would work on. All late spring, summer and early fall I worked on the project, dedicating a little bit of time nearly every day to the project. It was quite satisfying to see the results of my efforts every step of the way. I was not afraid to re-lay a stone wall if I had gotten off-kilter a bit. And I was not afraid to make changes to my plans. For example, rather than use cedar boards for the vegetable beds, I decided to use composite lumber. I hope they last forever! Thirty railroad ties were removed altogether. Much dirt was moved around, well-aged cow manure was used to amend the vegetable beds, flower bulbs were dug, sorted, and replanted. Landscape cloth was laid and cypress mulch was applied. Grass seed was sown in new paths.

Where there had been a large vegetable garden with two shrub areas and a strawberry bed around it, now I have:
1. A 6x19 foot stone framed raised bed with four lilac shrubs and 200 bulbs of four different spring flowers.
2. A 4x18 foot stone framed raised bed with two blueberry shrubs, ground cover sedums, and daffodil and grape hyacinth bulbs.
3. Four 4x8 foot raised garden beds framed by 12-inch high composite lumber boards. There are grassy or mulched paths between all the beds. In another area of the back yard is a 6x38 foot stone framed raised perennial flower bed.

So, what’s next? Well, I do have 45 leftover stone blocks. Let the musings begin again!

KIRKSVILLE MASTER GARDENERS HONOR PAST MEMBERS

The Kirksville Area Master Gardener Club added two new plaques to its Memorial Bench in October. The Memorial Bench is located at the University of Missouri Adair County Extension Center, in the Garden-n-Grow program garden. The bench was purchased by the Kirksville Area Master Gardeners and placed there in 2009 to be used by the participants in the Garden-n-Grow program, but also to allow the club to memorialize contributors to the Master Gardener program. The first plaque placed on the Memorial Bench in 2010 was to honor Master Gardener Sherrie Corbett who was a dedicated Garden-n-Grow volunteer. The new plaques added this past October honor Master Gardeners Travis Freeman and Joan Weerts. Travis supported the Master Gardener program in several ways, from hosting garden tours and meetings to supplying heirloom vegetable plants. Joan volunteered to assist with numerous programs and administrative tasks, and helped organize several regional and state Master Gardener conferences and workshops. These members may be gone, but they are not forgotten.
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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 9-11: Great Plains Vegetable Growers Conference; contact me for more information or go to http://www.greatplainsgrowers.org. This is an excellent conference for those seeking information on growing fruits and vegetables whether you are a market gardener, commercial producer or a home gardener. There will be pre-conference workshops on Thursday, January 9 on beekeeping, tree fruits, soils and irrigation and high tunnels. The conference will be held at Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph.

January 18: Beekeeping Workshop, 12-6 pm, Chillicothe Litton Center, Jenkins Center Expo Building Chillicothe, MO. Presenters are Steve and Becky Tippton. Several local beekeepers with experience will also be there to answer questions. RSVP by calling 660-214-0132 or email georges@chbeekeeping.com. No cost to attend.


April 5: Spring Forward Gardening Workshop, Moberly.

-Missouri Botanical Garden-