

December Gardening Calendar

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It has been a record setting wet fall. In response landscapes, vacant lots, and parks were lush and green until the mid-November freeze. Some summer weeds are still trying to set seed and the new winter weeds are trying to find some room to grow! Accomplish a reasonable control of weeds in the lawn by mowing on a regular basis. The mowing prevents the weeds from growing over more desirable plants and reduces potential seed production. Another tactic to control weeds is to use a contact herbicide for broadleaf weeds such as "Weed Free Zone". Follow the label instructions provided on all pesticides.

The mowing tactic works especially well if you have accepted the concept of the "sustainable winter lawn" where the presence of horseherb, rescue grass, and annual bluegrass are accepted as the winter lawn. All those weeds mow well and prosper without irrigation in the winter to produce an attractive groundcover.

If the freeze in November wasn't severe in your neighborhood, certainly expect more freezes this month. Move any remaining tropical plants such as tropical hibiscus, bougainvillea, and mandivilla into a freeze-proof shelter. For cold-sensitive plants such as lemons and limes that are too large to move into shelter, have coverings ready to use. Commercial products such as Insulate and Plankets work or you can use old blankets. Cover the cold sensitive citrus when temps are forecast to be lower than 30 degrees F. To protect cyclamen blooms, apply a strip of Insulate or other fabric over the plants at the same 30-degree forecast.

A heat source to protect the citrus will be advisable at forecasts below 28 degrees. Mechanic's lights and poultry heat lamps work well.

Consider a "living Christmas tree" for the holidays this year. An Aleppo pine, Italian stone pine, deodar cedar, Arizona cypress, or rosemary can be decorated for the holidays and then be planted as a permanent addition to the landscape. For more information visit my archived articles on the topic at plantanswers.com.

In the vegetable garden continue the harvest of broccoli and the greens. Harvested leaf by leaf and keeping up the nutrient level with supplemental fertilization will allow a long season of production into April. Onions can be planted this month for harvest in May. They are another plant that requires generous fertilization. Prepare the planting bed with 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of winterizer fertilizer.

The record levels of moisture contribute to high snail and slug populations. Keep refreshing the slug and snail bait every 2 weeks. Primula, pansies, and the leafy vegetables are especially prone to slug and snail damage.

Butterflies are active 12 months of the year in our area. The zinnias, mistflower, salvias, lantanas, milkweed, and porter weed usually finish as nectar sources in November so seek some alternatives such as dianthus, stocks, alyssum, and calendula for December and the rest of the winter.

To maximize songbird activity and ease of observation maintain a bird feeding program. Provide suet for insect eaters such as wrens, kinglets, and warblers. The seed-eating cardinals, chickadees, and titmice will respond to sunflower seed. Goldfinches especially like thistle seed. A water source is not as essential in the winter time as the summer, but it is often dry enough to bring the birds in for a drink and bath when you provide the water.