

# Missouri Environment & Garden

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## **Purchasing and Roasting Chestnuts for the Holidays**

It's that time of year when you hear the familiar tune, "chestnuts roasting on an open fire." Chestnuts are versatile and can be a healthy, low-fat addition to a meal as an appetizer, main or side dish, or as a dessert. Chestnuts are available in the produce section of most grocery stores from late September through December. Like any produce, these nuts are perishable and have a limited shelf life in the grocery store. If you find the nuts under misters, these nuts will have poor quality. While fresh chestnuts are generally have a 40 to 50% moisture, yeasts and bacteria, such as *Penicillium*, *Fusarium*, and *Aspergillus* are found on nuts that have been stored in an overly moist condition.

To purchase the best chestnuts, check for clean outer shells that are a shiny brown color. The tan-colored end of the nut (e.g., hilum) should be free of mold. The freshest chestnuts are very firm and do not dent when you press on the shell with your thumb and forefinger. When cut, the "nutmeat" should be yellow. Blue streaking through the nut, a vinegary smell, or a slimy feel to the nut is another indication that the nut was stored too wet and should be discarded.



Figure 1. Chestnuts

After purchasing chestnuts, they should be placed in a ventilated plastic bag in the refrigerator for use within a few weeks. To keep chestnuts for one or two months, store them at a cooler temperature (30°F). For year-round use, seal them in a non-ventilated bag and place them in the freezer. Whichever way you choose to store them, the nuts should be cured at room temperature for 3 to 5 days before roasting. During the curing process, starch in the nut is converted to sugar, resulting in a sweeter flavor. Once the nuts have cured, the shells will dent slightly when they are squeezed. Because of the high

moisture content of the nut, the outer shells are slit open with a sharp knife before roasting. A single slit across the widest part of the nut will release the moisture during cooking and prevent the

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# The Holly and the Ivy

The holiday season is steeped with many traditions and none perhaps quite as strong as decorating the home with plants and plant material. While Christmas trees and poinsettias dominate the plants usually associated with the holidays, there are other species that add much to this festive time of the year which is laden with tradition.

The word “tradition” is derived from the Latin *traditionem* which means “handing over” or “passing on”. Indeed, the concept of a tradition is to keep alive a practice that has been in place for generations, if not centuries. More often than not, the reason behind a certain tradition, such as the use of greenery at Christmas, has long been lost. Yet the tradition continues.

The use of plants for indoor decoration at this time of the year actually can be traced back to pagan practices of the pre-Christian era associated with the winter solstice. The latter typically occurs December 21st/ 22nd. Although various cultures commemorated this event in different ways, evergreens seem to be a common denominator that united all celebrations. Early civilizations considered evergreen plants to be symbolic of life. The use of these plants to adorn homes during the winter was believed to assure the survival of household members through what were often very harsh, austere conditions, and to remind them of the planting season that (hopefully) was soon to come.

Holly and ivy are examples of evergreens used for decorative purposes well before the Christian era. Holly was the sacred plant of the Roman god Saturn and an important part of the Roman festival of Saturnalia. This festival was held on December 17th (later expanded to conclude on the 25th) to commemorate the dedication of the temple of Saturn. Additionally, the Druids considered holly to be sacred and believed its use would ward off evil spirits. Undoubtedly, both civilizations enjoyed the contrast between holly’s bright red berries and glossy green foliage during a rather dull, colorless time of the year.

Ivy was associated with Bacchus, the Roman god of wine. The festival honoring Bacchus was quite raucous and involved imbibing large quantities of wine. Revelers

thought that wearing a crown fashioned from ivy would spare them from the after effects of excessive consumption. Later civilizations associated ivy with (among other things) death. Oak was a sacred tree to the Celts and Druids and the fact that ivy could kill a tree it overgrew such as a mighty oak was quite symbolic to those people of the power it held. Ivy also was considered a symbol of fidelity, fertility and good luck.

Decorating the home with evergreens was considered a form of pagan idolatry for many years after the Church (in 336 A.D.) designated December 25th as the day Christmas was to be observed. Slowly, the association of indoor plant use at this time of the year was transferred from paganism to Christianity. For example, “The Holly and the Ivy” is a popular Christmas carol that dates back to the 15th century. It took holly, a plant with deep pagan roots, and gave it Christian symbolism instead. The original version of the song published nearly 1000 years earlier was quite different and described a contest between the two plants for a favorite spot in the hall (home).

Another popular carol entreats those celebrating Christmas to “deck the halls with boughs of holly.” Indeed, until the 19th century holly was much more popular than Christmas trees for interior decoration. This custom probably dates back to the 17th century when Oliver Cromwell, English political figure, banned traditional celebrations of Christmas, deeming them too pagan in nature. In response, many people tied up “holly” boughs of mixed evergreens and hung them in their homes at Christmas. The “holly” gradually became “holly” and we still festoon our homes with boughs of holly at this festive time of the year.

Other, traditions associated holly as being a male plant (not entirely wrong since it is dioecious) and ivy as being female. Superstition maintained that whichever plant was brought into the house first at the holidays would determine whether the man or woman of the household would “rule” during the coming year. Additionally, “holly-boy” and “ivy-girl” effigies were often fashioned to be stolen by members of the opposite sex and burned

in effigy. The meaning behind the latter act is uncertain, if not alarming.

Plants such as holly, ivy and other evergreens were rarely brought into the home before Christmas Eve in days of old and to do otherwise was considered “bad luck” for the coming year. This meant that the greenery and other plant material used still were fresh for Christmas Day and posed much less of a fire hazard—a definite “must” when one considers the primary source of illumination during that era was through the use of live candles.

Given our current tendency to start decorating for the holiday season early, greenery and other cut plant material brought into the home at the beginning of the season is likely to get very dry by the time New Year’s Day arrives. This, in turn, could pose a fire hazard. It is important to start with plant material as fresh as possible. The very freshest greenery comes from one’s own landscape and should be used whenever possible. If the latter is not an option, purchase greens as soon as they become available at retail outlets. Homeowners generally can take better care of greenery than merchants who have an abundant inventory to care for on the sales lot. After purchasing, re-cut the stems and place the cut ends of the greenery in water. Keep the plant material in the coolest place possible until it is time to move it indoors.

When moved indoors, never place decorations containing greenery near sources of heat such as hot air ducts, radiators or appliances that produce heat. Fireplaces where sparks from an open flame might ignite greenery should also be avoided. Plant material should be removed if/when it becomes dry. The latter will vary according to species, use and indoor location.

Another safety aspect concerning plant material used in holiday decoration involves knowing which traditional plants contain toxic compounds that might represent a health risk, especially if children are present. For example, the fruit (red berries) of holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are considered mildly poisonous because of a compound called illicin and can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea if ingested. These bright berries are quite

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appealing to young children and special care should be taken if holly is used in seasonal decorations in households with small children present. Keep the holly well out of the reach of youngsters and make sure that any berries which might accidentally fall from the decoration cannot be retrieved by a curious child.

English ivy (*Hedera helix*) also produces a toxic compound known as saponin but poisonings from this plant are extremely

rare due to the relatively low levels of the toxic agent in leaf tissue.

As you decorating with greenery such as holly and ivy this holiday season remember you are helping to perpetuate a tradition rich in symbolism and meaning that has been ongoing for many centuries. Unlike our ancient ancestors, we give little thought to making it through the rigors of winter. However, like people of all ages we appreciate the beauty of plants and the

joy they bring to our lives when used in holiday decorations.

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## **Amaryllis: An Alternative Plant for the Holidays**

Plants make thoughtful gifts at this time of the year or simply represent a good way of “rewarding” yourself for some accomplishment (such as making it through another year). Although poinsettia is the number one selling plant in the United States during the holiday season, amaryllis deserves consideration as an additional or alternative plant. Its huge blooms are spectacular and come in many colors including bright, cheerful red. In addition to being very colorful, it has the added attraction of being relatively easy to re-bloom and can continue to give pleasure to its recipient for many years.

The plant commonly sold as amaryllis actually is misnamed and is a member of the genus *Hippeastrum*, not *Amaryllis*. *Hippeastrum* is native to the tropical Americas whereas the true *Amaryllis* is native to Africa. Both are members of the *Amaryllidaceae* family. “*Hippeastrum*” comes from the Greek word meaning “horseman’s star”; a name most likely selected for this plant because of the resemblance of its flowers to a medieval weapon used by horseman. For simplicity’s sake we will continue to refer to the plant as amaryllis in this article.

Most of the amaryllis sold today are hybrids developed by the Dutch and selected for their huge, showy flowers and forcing ease. It is not unusual for a vigorous bulb to produce up to six flowers per scape (flower stalk). Since amaryllis is native to the subtropical and tropical Americas, their tender nature forces us to treat them as greenhouse or house plants here in the Midwest. These traits cause them to maintain a small but constant share of the potted plant market around the holidays.

Amaryllis production for the hobbyist is relatively straight-forward. During the fall and early winter, bulbs are readily available from yard and garden stores as well as other retail outlets. One should choose a healthy bulb that has its original roots intact. Bulbs with all roots removed to the bulb plate will display inferior performance during their first year of growth, even though they may bloom. Bulbs should be planted in a well-drained, highly organic potting mix that retains adequate moisture. A mixture of sphagnum peat, vermiculite and perlite works well. Maintaining this medium in a slightly acid state is desirable.

Containers for amaryllis production should be at least two inches wider than the diameter of the bulb. Keep the growing medium uniformly moist but do not allow water to stand for extended periods of time except for severely root-bound plants. Amaryllis should be fed using a complete, water-soluble fertilizer after flower emergence. Follow recommendations on the label for rates.

The bulb one purchases will already have a scape formed. Exposure to proper temperatures will cause this scape to elongate, mature and flower. Since amaryllis is tropical by nature, plants respond well to high temperatures (both day and night). A minimum of 70 degrees F. during the day and 60 degrees at night is ideal during the growth cycle of the plants. Temperatures lower than 50 degrees can be injurious and should be avoided. Amaryllis requires, on the average, from six to eight weeks from the beginning of growth to the production of flowers.

Re-blooming amaryllis is relatively easy but the plant must be allowed to manufacture and store food in its bulb

in preparation for the process. This is accomplished by exposing the plant to light as bright as possible during the growth period that occurs after flowering has ended. Adequate water and fertilizer are essential for maximum food production during this period. Moving the plant out-of-doors after the danger of cool temperatures has passed will facilitate growth and improve subsequent blooming.

In September, the plant should be brought in from outside and water withheld. This will induce dormancy, which should be maintained for several months. During its dormant phase, an amaryllis should be kept on the cool side and should not receive water. The leaves will wither and dry during this phase and may be removed.

The growth cycle (along with blooming) can be repeated by forcing the plant out of dormancy by watering and subjecting it to warm temperatures as described above. Repotting may be necessary if the bulb has outgrown its original container.

For out-of-town plant lovers on your holiday gift list, amaryllis bulbs make practical gifts and are readily available at this time of the year. They are easily shipped and give the recipient added delight past the holiday season as they watch their bulb grow and bloom. Amaryllis also offers an excellent, “hands-on” learning experience for youngsters. They are easy to handle and start growth soon after being potted. Their huge blooms represent a fitting reward for plant lovers of all ages.

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# Huge Outbreak of Rust Across Missouri

Several phone calls have surfaced concerning the off colored turfgrasses around the state. Large areas turning yellow to orange in color are raising questions. What is it? And, why?

If homeowners take a closer look at individual leaf blades they will notice orange, powdery pustules. This is usually nothing to be alarmed about since weather patterns will change soon. The periods of cloudy, moist conditions followed by warmer sunny days present conditions favorable for this turfgrass disease.

Rust is most severe on susceptible cultivars of Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue,



Figure 1. Rust pustules on Kentucky bluegrass leaves.

perennial ryegrass and zoysiagrass. Rust symptoms usually appear in late August to early September and continue through the fall months. Rust can also develop

at other times of year, depending on environmental conditions, turfgrass species and rust species. Disease severity can vary dramatically from one year to another.

## Conditions

The rust fungi (*Puccinia* spp.) overwinter as urediniospores in infected plants or are reintroduced each summer by wind-blown spores. Infection of leaf blades is favored by moderate temperatures (68 to 85 degrees F) and extended wet periods. The disease tends to be more severe in partially shaded areas, such as under trees or along fence rows. Once infection occurs, slightly higher temperatures favor symptom development. Turfgrasses under stress (nutrient deficiency, drought, shading, close mowing heights and high temperatures) are more likely to be seriously damaged by the disease.

## Management

Turfgrasses provided with optimal levels of fertilizer and water is less likely to be severely damaged by rust. Avoiding night watering decreases the length of time the leaf blades remain wet. However, we have not been irrigating here this fall. Mother-nature has been providing the extended leaf wetness periods. Regular mowing removes infected leaf tips from the

plant and will help reduce inoculum levels. The best strategy is to mow frequently at a height not less than what is recommended for the turfgrass. Avoid close mowing or scalping of the turf. Many of us have been finished with mowing this season, therefore inoculum levels have remained high promoting highly infected areas.

For long-term disease management, choose grass cultivars with a high level of resistance to rust. The National Turfgrass Evaluation Web site at ntep.org will provide the most up-to-date information on relative resistance of selected turfgrass cultivars to rust.

The decision to use fungicides is often difficult because applications need to be made relatively early in rust development. Because the rust epidemic is dependent on weather, it is hard to determine if early fungicide sprays are warranted. In most years rust does not reach damaging levels before the turfgrass enters winter dormancy, so fungicides are not routinely used for rust control in home or commercial landscapes. As weather conditions change, the symptoms will disappear.

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## Caring for Your Christmas Tree Through the Holidays

Each year, it is estimated that more than 30 million live Christmas trees are used in households across the United States. When using a live tree for the holidays, there are some simple steps that will go a long way in providing a safer and longer lasting tree. When choosing a tree, important things to look for are shape, color, and needle retention. If the tree is fresh, the needles should be pliable and bend, not snapping off when bent. When shaking or bouncing the tree, needles should be well attached with very few falling off. It is normal for the tree to shed some needles, but too many may be a sign the tree is not fresh. A healthy tree should have good color as well, not yellowed or wilting. When the tree was cut and the conditions of storage and transportation before arriving at the lot

will determine the length of time in which the needles will hold on after cutting. In general, pines will hold their needles the longest, followed by firs, and lastly spruces. The warm weather this season has made it difficult to provide fresh trees as newly cut trees need cool storage. Use added caution this season when selecting your tree off the lot.

Once you bring your tree home, water is the single most important factor in determining the length of time your tree will stay fresh indoors. If the tree is to be stored longer than a day, cut off an inch of the tree base and place in a bucket of water. This allows the tree to immediately uptake water. When you bring the tree into the home, cut off an inch of the base and immediately place the tree in a stand that

holds ample water. Always keep the tree well-supplied with water and check the water level several times per day. A freshly cut tree will rapidly absorb water during the first few days indoors. Never let the water level fall below the base of the tree as the cut end will seal over and the tree will not be able to uptake any more water. If the tree does run out of water, re-cut the base to expose fresh wood. To further guard against moisture loss keep the tree away from air ducts, sunny windows, and heat-producing appliances such as fireplaces and radiators.

Christmas trees can be sprayed with fire retardant to prevent flash fires. The best method for fire proofing a tree is to keep it well-supplied with water. However, there

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are commercial fire retardants treatments that can be sprayed on trees to reduce flammability. Another caution is to use only UL-approved lights and non-flammable decorations on your tree. Keep trees away from heat sources and flammable items such as candles. Never leave home or go to bed with the Christmas tree lights on.

There are many wonderful things you can do with your Christmas tree after

the holidays are over. I place mine in the backyard under the bird feeders, and the birds come in masses to hang out on the branches of the dead tree. The tree can be ground for mulch to place in flowerbeds or gardens. Christmas trees make great fish attractors by weighting the base of the tree and sinking it in a pond. Most urban areas have a curbside recycling program for your Christmas trees. Check your

local newspaper for dates of the curbside pick-up.

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## **Safeguarding Missouri's Citizens and Agriculture Through Pesticide Applicator Training**

The safe and responsible use of pesticides is of up-most importance to Missouri's agricultural sector and its citizens. All pesticides used in the U.S. must be registered (licensed) by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Registration of pesticides assures they will be properly labeled and if used in accordance with specifications, will not cause unreasonable harm to the environment.

During the decade that made up the nineteen-sixties, there arose a new awareness of ecology and the environmental resulting in an outcry of public concern over all types of environmental contamination from smoking, belching chimneys and smog; foul water, rivers and streams, as well as pollution from pesticides. Up until that time the old adage of "if a little works, a lot will work better!" was the major premise for applying chemicals to address pest problems on the farm and around the home.

As a result of this public outcry, the EPA and Congress enacted a "new" pesticide law, *the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, Rodenticide Act* (FIFRA) in the early 1970s that provided the impetus to establish a national program of federal/state certification of pesticide applicators. The primary focus of this new law was to provide federal control of pesticide distribution, sales, and use. Under FIFRA, the EPA was given authority not only to study the consequences of pesticide usage but also to require users to register when purchasing restricted use pesticides. One of the goals of this program would be to provide the quantity and quality of information needed for various levels of persons using pesticides, ranging from

structural pest control specialist to farm laborers.

Because of continuing public concerns over potential effects of pesticides on human health and the environment, new laws and regulations that govern pesticides and their use make an intensive training program essential. For example, there were several changes in the recently implemented Worker Protection Standard. Additional new legislation which provides training opportunities for this program includes the Endangered Species Program and the Federal Record keeping Requirement.

The University of Missouri along with the Missouri Department of Agriculture provides certification and recertification for this diverse sector of individuals involved in the pesticide industry. Since the inception of Missouri's pesticide training program, over 6,000 commercial pesticide applicators have received at least initial training. Every three years, these applicators must be recertified by training programs conducted by University Extension as mandated by the Missouri Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Pesticide Control.

The University of Missouri Extension Pesticide Program provides educational outreach for individuals aspiring to become licensed commercial pesticide applicators as well as private applicators. If you engage in the application of a restricted-use pesticide for hire you are considered a commercial applicator. If you engage in pesticide application for the purposes of producing an agricultural commodity on property you or your employer owns, or rent without compensation other than trading of personal services between producers of agricultural commodities you

are considered a private applicator. Private pesticide applicator training is available at the local level through your regional extension offices. It requires no exam to be certified or recertified.

The commercial applicator program involves two areas of instruction: a core training session in which all trainees attend and the specialty category section in which the attendees conduct their business activities. The core training session provides basic pesticide knowledge which impacts all pesticide applicators. The instruction is provided by persons representing several agencies including the Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Department of Natural Resources and University Extension.

Missourians wishing to become licensed commercial applicators must pass a core exam, as well as a category exam tailored to the specific area in which they wish to become certified. There are 11 different specialty categories within the commercial PAT program (category 1 has two sections: 1A: Agricultural Plant, and 1B: Ag. Animal Pest Control and category 7 has three sections: 7A: General Structural Pest; 7B: Termite; and 7B: Fumigation Pest Control).

Applicators can certify in one or more of the following categories depending on which area of expertise you are qualifying for.

### **Commercial Pesticide Applicator Categories:**

- Category 1A: Agricultural Plant Pest Control
- Category 1B: Agricultural Animal Pest Control

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## Safeguarding Missouri's Citizens and Agriculture Through Pesticide Applicator Training

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- Category 2: Forest Pest Control
- Category 3: Ornamental and Turf Pest Control
- Category 4: Seed Treatment Pest Control
- Category 5: Aquatic Pest Control
- Category 6: Right-of-Way Pest Control
- Category 7A: General Structural Pest Control
- Category 7B: Termite Pest Control
- Category 7C: Fumigation Pest Control

- Category 8: Public Health Pest Control
- Category 9: Regulatory Pest Control
- Category 10: Demonstration and Research Pest Control
- Category 11a: Wood Products Pest Control

Training programs are conducted every January in Springfield, Kansas City, Cape Girardeau, St. Louis and Columbia. For dates and locations check out the Plant Protection Programs web site at: <http://ppp.missouri.edu/pat/training.htm>.

*(Information used in this article came in part from MU Extension publications and Purdue Extension)*

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### New Guide from MU Center for Agroforestry Aims to Help Forestland Owners When Disaster Strikes Their Trees

COLUMBIA, Mo. – When fire, a wind storm, ice, vandalism, a flood or an earthquake hit your timberland, the University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry has the information you need for tallying and reporting the loss. Larry Godsey, Center economist, has penned the guide, “Understanding Casualty Loss of Timber,” AFA 1014, to guide landowners through the process of determining a casualty loss tax deduction.

“One of the most common questions regarding tax treatment of timber has to do with casualty loss,” Godsey said. “We hope this guide will answer this question by defining the major tax concepts involved in determining a casualty loss deduction; it aims to make the process a little more straightforward.”

Godsey outlines concepts including adjusted basis and fair market value, then takes readers through two scenarios involving casualty loss. He includes sample tax forms and shows how to fill them out according to each scenario.

In addition, Godsey explains what constitutes a casualty loss – it’s not just any loss of timber. Losses due to progressive deterioration, such as fungus, diseases, insects, worms or similar pests, are not typically considered casualty losses because they are not sudden, unexpected or unusual, he said.

The new guide is available both online and in print. Go to <http://www.centerforagroforestry.org/pubs/losstimber.pdf> to see and print the guide in PDF, or contact Michelle Hall, MU Center for Agroforestry senior information specialist, at [hallmich@missouri.edu](mailto:hallmich@missouri.edu) to order a copy. The publication also can be printed and/or ordered at <http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=AF1014>

For more information on casualty losses in timber, contact your local tax accountant or see the National Timber Tax Web site at [www.timbertax.org](http://www.timbertax.org)

nuts from bursting during roasting, but peeling is easier if two crossing slits are made into the shell. For roasting indoors, place the nuts on a cookie sheet in the oven at 425 °F for 25 minutes. Roasting outdoors will require a longer cooking

time. After nuts are cooked, let them cool for five minutes and peel while they are still warm. Remove the outer shell and the inner papery “skin” (e.g., pellicle) from the nut before you enjoy eating them. So,

when Jack Frost starts nipping at your toes, have fun roasting chestnuts!

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# January Gardening Calendar

## Houseplants

- **Weeks 1-4:** To clean heavily encrusted clay pots, scrub them with a steel wool pad after they have soaked overnight in a solution consisting of one gallon of water, and one cup each of white vinegar and household bleach.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Some plants are sensitive to the fluorine and chlorine in tap water. Water containers should stand overnight to allow these gases to dissipate before using on plants.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Wash the dust off of house plant leaves on a regular basis. This allows the leaves to gather light more efficiently and will result in better growth.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Set the pots of humidity-loving house plants on trays filled with pebbles and water. Pots should sit on the pebbles, not in the water.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Allow tap water to warm to room temperature before using on houseplants.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Fluffy, white mealy bugs on house plants are easily killed by touching them with a cotton swab soaked in rubbing alcohol.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Insecticidal soap sprays can be safely applied to most house plants for the control of many insect pests.
- **Weeks 1-2:** Quarantine new gift plants to be sure they do not harbor any insect pests.
- **Weeks 2-4:** Amaryllis aftercare: Remove spent flower after blooming. Set the plant in a bright sunny window to allow the leaves to fully develop. Keep the soil evenly moist, not soggy. Fertilize occasionally with a general purpose houseplant formulation.

## Ornamentals

- **Weeks 1-4:** Gently brush off heavy snows from tree and shrub branches.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Limbs damaged by ice or snow should be pruned off promptly to prevent bark from tearing.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Check stored summer bulbs such as dahlias, cannas and gladiolus to be sure they are not rotting or drying out.
- **Weeks 1-4:** To reduce injury, allow ice to melt naturally from plants. Attempting to remove ice may damage plants further.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Use sand, bird seed, sawdust or vermiculite to gain traction on icy paths. Avoid salt or ice melters as these may injure plants.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Make an inventory of the plants in your home landscape. Note their location and past performance. Plan changes on paper now.
- **Weeks 2-3:** Sow pansy seeds indoors now.

## Miscellaneous

- **Weeks 1-4:** Avoid foot traffic on frozen lawns as this may injure turf grasses.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Make a resolution to keep records of your garden this year.
- **Weeks 1-4:** 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.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Check all fruit trees for evidence of rodent injury to bark. Use baits or traps where necessary.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Cakes of suet hung in trees will attract insect-hunting woodpeckers to your garden.
- **Weeks 1-4:** Brightly colored paints applied to the handles of tools will make them easier to locate in the garden.
- **Weeks 1-2:** Seed and nursery catalogs arrive. While reviewing garden catalogs, look for plants with improved insect, disease and drought-tolerance.
- **Weeks 1-2:** Old Christmas trees can be recycled outdoors as a feeding station for birds. String garlands of peanuts, popcorn, cranberries, fruits and suet through their boughs.
- **Week 1:** 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.
- **Weeks 2-4:** Swap seeds and plant information with your gardening friends.