

Garden Club Horticultural Hints

February 2020

Winter is gardening season, too!



For the birds. One of the hardest things for birds in the winter is the lack of water. While putting out seeds and suet certainly helps, a shallow container of water birds can drink from is vital. If you don't have a heated bird bath, put out fresh water for the birds each morning in a sunny location. It may freeze during the day, but the birds in your garden will have had the chance to get a very important drink before it does

Deer damage like this is preventable, but you have to keep up the spraying to keep it effective.



Get out and take a class! Whether it's on vegetable gardening or orchid growing, pruning shrubs in your yard or replacing your conventional lawn with a more environmentally sound alternative, use the time you are not gardening to become a better gardener and steward of the land.



In addition to garden club programs, look to libraries as sources of winter programs on gardening subjects. Also, see the websites of Native Plant Trust and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society for programs.

If you are a vegetable or flower gardener who starts your own seedlings indoors for planting later, February is the month to get ageratum, petunias, and other annual flowers started along with vegetables such as beets, leeks, lettuce and onions. Your work now will give you a head start on a more productive garden this season



While this has been a low-snowfall winter thus far, that can change quickly in February. Clear snow around small trees and shrubs to make it harder for rodents to eat the bark. On a warm day (above 40 degrees), spray deer repellents on the evergreens that the deer eat. As they get hungrier, deer become less fussy about what's on the menu, but a mouthful of repellent may send them to another area.

If you have trees or shrubs to remove, or other major work in the garden, get it done while the ground is frozen in order to prevent much more serious damage that will occur if it is done when the ground softens in the spring – usually by mid-March. Soft ground compacted by heavy machinery will need a major reworking to make it loose enough for plants to grow well next year. Few things are as bad for lawns or gardens as soil compaction.



Take advantage of days when it is above freezing to spray dormant oil on your fruit and nut trees. Dormant – also called horticultural – oil is harmless to birds and bees. It coats and smothers egg masses of damaging insects so they will not hatch and start eating the tree’s new leaves in the spring. It must be applied on days when the temperature is above freezing and before leaves start to open, so February and March provide the best window for their use.

Caterpillars feasted on the leaves of this Amelanchier (shadbush) two years ago. Last winter, beginning in early February, the tree was given a spray of horticultural oil every three weeks. The egg masses were smothered by the oil and never hatched. There is no sign of an infestation this winter.

On a warm day, consider a trip around your yard to refresh the anti-desiccant coating on both broad leaf (like rhododendrons) and needled evergreens that can be damaged by strong sun or drying winds over the winter. (Wilt-Pruf and Wilt-Stop are two such products). While we have mostly had a mild winter so far, every New Englander knows there is no guarantee harsh weather isn’t coming.

When you spray deer-repelling or anti-desiccants in your garden, it’s always best to break out some old clothes and a water-proof jacket with a hood.



Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for January and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com