



## **“From the Potting Shed”**

Riverview Garden Club - Helpful Hints

February 2025

February is all about prepping for spring! Give your green thumb a workout this month to get in shape for when spring arrives. There's plenty you can do to prep your garden and beat the winter blues, indoors and out.

### **Things to do this month...**

#### **Force Branches for a Flowering Display**

Add some natural color to your home by cutting branches of spring flowering trees and shrubs to bring indoors for forcing. Good candidates include forsythia, flowering quince, redbud, star or tulip magnolia and flowering pear. Create an arrangement by gathering stems of birch, or alder which form catkins. Don't overlook pussywillow stems, which readily root in water and can later be transplanted into your garden.

#### **Shop for Bulbs in Bloom**

Treat spring fever by snapping up pots of forced bulbs, when they become available at local retailers and garden centers. Hyacinth will flood your home with fragrance, while grape hyacinth offers a more subtle floral perfume. After flowers finish, snip spent stems, and place pots near a bright window. Keep plants alive until all danger of spring frost is past, then tuck them into the garden. Next year's flower show might be slight, but blooms will multiply in years to come.

#### **Prune Hydrangeas**

Clean up hydrangeas by removing old, faded flowers. On large-flowered macrophylla types, clip stems beneath the dried blooms all the way down to the next flower bud. It's also time to prune *Hydrangea paniculata* (examples: Limelight or PeeGee), native *Hydrangea arborescens* (examples: 'Annabelle' or Incrediball) and oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*). Snip stems on these hydrangeas to reduce height and floppiness, cutting branches to 6 inches tall, or simply removing faded flower clusters.

### **Protect Plants from Critters**

Between snows, check prized landscape plants. Use pieces of bird netting to cover vulnerable plants that have visible leaves, like Lenten roses and coral bells (*heuchera*). Deer and rabbits usually leave these plants alone, except when they're the only live leaves in the winter garden. Clean up Lenten roses while you're in the garden, cutting back old leaves, which are darker green and often tattered. This allows blooms to shine.

### **Spray Dormant Oil**

While woody plants are dormant, apply a horticultural oil spray. This treatment helps kill eggs, disease spores and over-wintering insects including mites, aphids and scale on plants (fruit trees, ornamental trees, roses and other pest-plagued shrubs). Follow label directions carefully. Most dormant oil sprays specify spraying when temperatures are above 40 degrees F and the next eight hours stay above freezing and lack precipitation.

### **Tend Indoor Gardens**

Dry winter air means houseplants need to be watered more frequently. Inspect plants thoroughly at least every two weeks to check for pests. Late winter is also an ideal time to repot houseplants in preparation for spring's longer days, which trigger new growth. Move pot-bound plants to containers that are 1 inch larger in diameter than their current containers. As you repot, gently remove the topmost layer of soil and add fresh potting soil to that area.

### **Order Seeds**

If you haven't already, place your seed orders, especially for spring crops like radishes, peas and lettuce. Order for summer and fall crops, along with pollinator friendly flowers and herbs. Use this slow time to think about your garden goals and make a plan.

### **Test Seeds for Viability**

If you have seeds from previous growing seasons, test them to see if they're still good. To test seeds, place 10 seeds on a few layers of moist paper towels, enclose the paper towel in a plastic bag so it doesn't dry out. Place it in a warm bright location (65-70 degrees is fine) but away from direct sun. Check the seeds every couple of days. If 5 or more have sprouted, there's a 50% or better chance that the seeds are viable to plant this season.

### **Insulate Roses**

When shoveling and clearing snow, use the snow to your advantage by placing it where it can help insulate plants like roses or perennials. Place snow carefully around the base of roses, taking care not to break canes under the weight. Make sure you're adding salt-free shovels full of snow around the plants. The chemicals in salt-laden snow will harm plants.

### **Plan Your Vegetable Garden**

It's not too early to start thinking about your vegetable and herb garden plan for spring. Make sure to rotate vegetable plant families to protect them from diseases and pests, and to help the soil's fertility. Draw out your plans and keep them in a notebook. Once you have three or four years of plans in hand, you can simply repeat them in succession in future years.

Resource:

"February Gardening To-Do List", Julie Martens Forney, HGTV Magazine.

***Happy Winter Gardening!***



*Watch for the Ground Hog's prediction on February 2<sup>nd</sup>!*

*Will there be more winter weather or an early spring?*