



"Your Outdoor Source"

2442 State Route 27 – North Brunswick, NJ 08902 – (732) 297-1244 – Open Seven Days

Winter Gardening Tips



How Light Affects Poinsettias

To learn how to get your holiday poinsettia to bloom next year, [click here](#).

Winter is a good time to prune deciduous trees. Once the foliage has dropped, it's easier to get a look at the branching structure and spot any potential problems. Richard Eaton, an arborist with [The Care of Trees](#), an AHS partner and a national tree care company, shares the following tips for pruning small or recently planted deciduous trees:

- Prune out any diseased or broken limbs.
- Remove branches that cross over one another.
- Remove branches that go against the flow of the tree's natural habit (i.e. upward pointing branches on a weeping tree).
- Avoid pruning branches completely flush with the trunk or major limbs; make cuts slightly above the junction point, leaving the branch "collar" intact.
- Don't use wound sealants; trees have a natural ability to heal themselves.
- Try not to disrupt the natural architecture of the tree.
- Be conservative; cut only branches you are confident need to be removed.
- For safety, use tools that allow you to reach up into the canopy, such as pole pruner, rather than climbing up on a ladder. If you need a ladder, says Eaton, it's probably time to call a certified arborist.



Cutting Back Ornamental Grasses

Ornamental grasses such as maiden grass (*Miscanthus* spp.), river oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), and fountain grass (*Pennisetum* spp.) often remain attractive in winter, even though they are completely dormant. In winter, their foliage turns from summer greens to shades of wheat and almond. They are especially striking when contrasted with evergreens.

There are two rules regarding when to cut back ornamental grasses. The first is that it is up to the gardener to decide when they are no longer attractive. Snow, sleet, and freezing rain can ruin their effect. Once this happens, the time has come to cut them back to a few inches above the ground.

The second rule for cutting back grasses is that the annual clipping must occur before new growth starts in the spring. And it's a good idea to trim them before plants around them start to awaken so as to avoid trampling the tender shoots of emerging bulbs and perennials.



Forcing branches for winter bouquets

The flowers of some shrubs and trees can be "forced," induced to bloom, indoors while the winter weather outside continues. Some of the easiest to force include pussy willows (*Salix* spp), flowering quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*), and forsythias (*Forsythia* spp.).

Among the pussy willows, the Japanese pussy willow (*Salix chaenomeloides*), a small tree that reaches about 18 feet,



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has three-inch long, fuzzy pink flowers known as “catkins”. The black pussy willow grows to 10 feet and has purple-black catkins.

Flowering quince is a six to 10 foot shrub with flowers that are usually orange-red. There are also pink and white flowering forms. Forsythias come in many shapes and shades of yellow. One of the earliest to bloom is called early forsythia (*Forsythia ovata*), which blooms from March to April.

To force the branches of any one of these shrubs, cut them in January or February. Submerge the branches in tepid water overnight. The next day, place the branches upright in a container of water, making sure to cut off any buds from the parts of the stem below water in the vase. Leave the branches in a cool, dimly-lit room and change the water daily until the buds start to swell. Then, move them to a brightly-lit room and enjoy the colorful display!

Take Stock of Your Garden’s Design in Late Winter

Winter is the best time to take stock of the permanent elements of your landscape--the lawn, paths, and evergreens. As the backbone of your landscape's design, these parts of the garden interact with deciduous plants during the growing season.

If you find that your yard looks well-stocked, but pretty much the same, winter and summer, you may wish to make room for a small shrub or tree to add excitement with spring or summer flowers. Lilacs (*Syringa* spp), viburnums, and hydrangeas are flowering shrubs that come in many sizes and colors. Stewartias (*Stewartiaspp.*) and the ‘Forest Pansy’ redbud (*Cercis 'Forest Pansy'*) are excellent small flowering trees. Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) put on a glorious show in spring when the leaves emerge and in fall when they turn a dazzling scarlet.

After the first killing frost, does your garden seem empty or lacking in definition? Then look first to the lawn--it may be that its size outweighs other elements in your yard. If that is the case, consider adding planting beds--a larger one in front of the house, beds around existing trees to link them together, or a bed around the periphery of your lawn. Incorporate plants that provide winter interest into these beds.

If you don’t have any evergreens, plan to add some this coming spring, keeping their ultimate sizes in mind. The choices are almost limitless, but if deer are a problem in your area, some evergreens they don't eat are plum yew (*Cephalotaxus* spp.) and boxwoods (*Buxus* spp.).





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Wildlife in the Garden

Wildlife adds life and color to a garden that is especially welcome in late winter. Now is the time to take stock of the wildlife-friendly elements already in place in your garden and plan to add more in the next growing season to provide for wildlife throughout the long winter.

Think about adding the sorts of plants that invite wildlife into your garden—generally ones that produce food or shelter. Consider those that go to seed or produce berries at different times to keep edibles at hand throughout the dormant season. Natives such as goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) and coneflowers (*Echinacea* spp.) have evolved in tandem with the birds and small animals of your region. Allow their seedheads to stand over winter.

Thick or thorny shrubs and evergreens are safe places for cover or nesting. And layers of vegetation—stepping down from trees to shrubs to herbaceous ground covers—provide shelter. Be sure to provide a source of water, too. And, most important of all, try not to use synthetic chemical pesticides, which may harm wildlife.