



JANUARY GARDENING CALENDAR

All landscape plants, including lawns, can be brittle when temperatures are below freezing. If you do get winter precipitation in the form of ice, stay away from your plants until they thaw. Branches can snap quickly when ice is on them.

If you get heavy snow, lightly brushing it away with gentle sweeps from below the branches can prevent limbs from breaking with the weight, but use caution. If you do experience weather damaged plants, assess the damage once the snow and/or ice is gone. If there are broken branches, prune to remove any dangling limbs.

If leaves are burned, ignore it until spring. Pruning off cosmetic damage too early could expose more of the plant to further damage. Along with a little water, winter annuals including pansies and violas would benefit from some fertilizer periodically on a warm winter day.

This will keep them blooming better. Winter vegetables can grow all winter, provided the temperatures don't drop too low. Keep some covering handy, and if temperatures are predicted much below 28, you should protect them with an overturned box, pot or row cover.

Harvest as needed throughout the winter, but avoid contact when leaves are frozen since they will be brittle. Many gardeners are noticing that their azalea plants have a lot of yellow foliage on them. For the majority of the plants, this is their annual old leaf shed. Some evergreen plants shed leaves periodically all season, while others shed once a year. If you look closely, the leaves that are yellowing are those closest to the bottom of the branch.

The tip leaves and buds are still green. White and light pink varieties are more prone to the dramatic yellowing than darker flowering forms, but it is nothing to be worried about.

As one season ends, begin planning for the season ahead. Catalogs are arriving at a fast pace these days, and there are so many new and interesting things to try. Start planning and be sure to try something new each year.

Watch for greening in your lawn as January continues. This greening in a dormant, warm season grass will not be lawn grass but winter weeds. If you can catch them early, you can stop their growth.

PECANS

Pecans are synonymous with the holidays in the south. They are native to North America, from Texas to Illinois.

Native Americans were using pecans extensively long before the European settlers came. They pressed the oils for seasoning, ground them into meal to thicken stews, cooked them with beans, and roasted them for long hunting trips. While many still harvest and use native pecans, through plant breeding, the size and quality of the nut has grown substantially over the years.

Pecan trees grow best in a long, warm growing season, without much of a temperature drop at night, which is why they are a southern crop. Further north the hican, a cross between a pecan and a hickory tree are grown, which are more tolerant of cold weather. To produce nuts, you need at least two varieties for cross-pollination. Pecan trees produce separate male and female flowers on the same tree.

However, they are usually not in bloom at the same time on the same tree. Some varieties shed their pollen before the female flowers are receptive. Therefore they need pollen from another variety that matures its pollen a little later.

Nut size will vary with the variety, age of tree, size of the crop and moisture conditions during the growing season until shell hardening. Most trees will start to produce pecans within five to eight years depending on variety, growth rate and location.

Harvesting pecans occurs from mid-October through November, and occasionally into December. For home harvesting, gathering falling nuts can be an option, but you usually have to fight the squirrels, who are master nut gatherers.



By Tracy Courage

U of A System Division of Agriculture

Horticulture experts with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service predict that the recent mid-November freeze will take a toll next year on thin-barked woody plants, whose stems had not fully hardened.

"We won't know the extent of damage until the spring," said Jim Robbins, an extension horticulture expert for the Division of Agriculture specializing in ornamentals. "We predict next spring we will see a ton of severe bark death."

Temperatures in much of Arkansas plummeted by 20 to 30 degrees in a matter of hours on Nov. 11. In some areas of the states, temperatures dropped below 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Northern Arkansas had already had a frost, so they were further along in the dormancy season than central and southern Arkansas," Robbins said.

Damage will likely be more prevalent in central and southern Arkansas where woody plants were still actively growing when the November 11 freeze hit. Because the plants had not gone dormant, their vascular systems were still loaded with water at the time.

"We predict with high certainty that in early May we're going to see a lot of woody plants that have a thin bark that are either going to struggle to leaf out and collapse, or we'll see the bark splitting," he said. "We can trace it back to this unprecedented period we just went through."

HORTICULTURALISTS EXPECT WIDESPREAD BARK SPLIT, BARK DEATH IN THIN-BARKED WOODY PLANTS



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