

Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

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Has winter gotten to you yet? Here are several things we can do during the cold days of winter.

1. February is the time to prune trees.

Winter is the best time to prune deciduous trees. After trees lose their leaves in late autumn, their structure and shape are revealed. It's easier to see which branches are growing inward (get rid of those) or crossing others (get rid of those too). Winter pruning will encourage new growth in spring. During this dormant period, insects and diseases that could harm fresh-cut trunks or branches are also dormant. This is a very good time to trim Oak trees. An exception to this rule is spring-flowering trees. Wait to prune those in late spring after their flowers fade. If you prune them now, you'll be cutting off this spring's blossoms.

2. Prune shrubs.

Like trees, deciduous shrubs go dormant in cold weather. Prune them now to encourage healthy growth and flowering in spring. (You can wait to prune evergreen shrubs until next month, if they don't produce showy spring flowers.)



3. Add trellises, Arbors and Garden Art.

Without flowers and foliage to confuse your eye, you can really see the shape of your garden in winter. What's missing? Now is a good time to think about and add screening elements like trellises and arbors. Garden Art can add focal points of interest

in those empty spots. It can also make for a good conversation piece as well. Look up craft sites to make your own garden art.

With bare spots now visible, you'll also see where there's room in the garden to install new arbors, trellises, pergolas or garden art.

4. Order plants and seeds.

February doesn't need to be the low point of the gardening year. A safe way out of darker days and enforced inactivity is planning and reflection. Now is the time to go through seed and bulb catalogs and to choose flowers that do well in your garden. Order early to ensure you are able to get exactly what you want. If you order plants, the company will send them at the proper planting time for our area.

5. Fill a bird feeder.

To survive cold weather, birds need extra nutrition. Feed them high-fat foods for energy: White millet seed, thistle seed, sunflower seeds, peanuts, and peanut butter are good choices. If you are able, put out a winter water for the birds!

6. Order bare-root shrubs.

Because bare root shrubs are field grown and can be shipped with no soil or pots, the cost of using them is often significantly lower than using potted or root-balled plants. Then simply plant the bare root shrubs as soon as the ground thaws.



7. Reorganize your garden shed or garage.

Almost every garage I've walked into has the same affliction. Cardboard boxes from who-knows-when

outlining a space to park the car, with just a few inches to spare. Make a space saving rack for your tools. Maybe even build a potting bench. There are so many designs to choose from.

Whatever you do to help pass the time of winter and will shorten the time you have to wait on spring! Be ready and prepared to make your 2021 garden the best ever!



When to start your garden seeds

Starting Vegetable seeds indoors

Growing vegetables and flowers from seed is one of the most rewarding aspects of gardening. Starting from seeds has some definite advantages over buy plants, including; less expensive, more plant variety available, maximum control over growing conditions, increased control over planting time and gives a head start on spring planting! Here are the basic steps to seed starting.

Step 1, Containers: There are lots of choices for small containers to start your seeds. You can use pots, cell packs, trays, peat cups or pellets to start seeds. Commercial seed starting trays are inexpensive, come with clear plastic covers, have a reservoir tray for watering from the bottom, and are divided into individual planting cells.



Wash containers with soap and hot water, then rinse thoroughly. This is especially important if you're recycling containers that might be contaminated with bacteria or fungus.

Step 2, Starting Medium: Use a sterile, soilless seed starting mix made of peat, vermiculite, and perlite, rather than garden soil. Commercial mixes are available, or you can mix your own. Fill containers at least a couple of inches deep.

Step 3, Plant and Label Seed Containers: Each type of plant grows differently, so follow package instructions to plant seeds at the proper depth. To ensure success, plant at least two seeds per pot. Be sure to label each container.

Step 4, Temperature: Most seeds germinate best in soil temperatures around 75° F (24° C). Special warming mats are available for starting seeds. They are defiantly worth the investment.

Step 5, Light: Unless you have a sunny greenhouse, indoor light isn't bright enough for seeds. The solution is to hang a fluorescent light

fixture equipped with full-spectrum (daylight) bulbs about 6" above the seed trays. Adjust the height of the fixture as the plants grow. The lights will need to be on 14-16 hours a day, so a timer comes in handy.

Step 6, Water Seedlings in Containers:

Water seedlings very gently using room temperature water. It's best to water from the bottom, or use a very light spray that won't beat down the seedlings. Pour any excess water out of the reservoir tray as soon as the soil is moist.

Step 7, Cover Containers and Allow Seeds to Germinate: Cover your seedlings with plastic wrap or the clear cover provided with the seed tray and place on a warming mat warm under lights. Water from the bottom whenever the soil feels dry, but don't make it soggy. Some seeds germinate within a few days while others may take several weeks or more.

Step 8, Thin Seedlings: The seedlings will sprout generic leaves first, which will soon be replaced by "true" leaves that look more like the adult plant. Once true leaves emerge, use scissors to gently snip off the weaker seedlings, leaving one growing in each pot.

Step 9, Feed Seedlings: After the true leaves have formed, begin feeding seedlings about once a week with a very mild balanced organic fertilizer. Look for a fertilizer specifically for seedlings, or mix regular liquid fertilizer at 50% strength. Fish emulsion is a popular choice.



Step 10, Harden Seedlings for Outdoors:

Before planting outdoors, harden seedlings off first to acclimatize them to the change in air and light. Hardening takes from 10 days to 2 weeks. Place the seedlings outside in the shade for a few hours each day, increasing the time every day until they remain outside all day. Never leave plants out in freezing weather.

Step 11, Plant Seedlings Outdoors:

Your seedlings are now ready to plant in the garden. Space plants as indicated on the seed packet, and cover them if there's a sudden cold

snap. Mother Nature can throw us a curve ball every now and then.

Most importantly, When to Start: Here is a generic graft that may help you in determining when to start your seeds indoors, so they will be ready to plant in your garden after our last frost date. In Southwest Iowa, the last spring frost date is usually May 10th. Cole weather crops such as broccoli, cabbage, lettuce and spinach can be planted in the garden before our last spring frost date. It is still a good idea to protect them until frost threats are gone. To follow this generic chart, start your seeds x-x weeks before May 10th. Then you may plant them in your garden after the threat of frost is gone. As a reminder, most packets of seeds will have instructions for starting seeds indoors. It would be a good idea to follow the instructions for that particular seed.

Vegetable	Start seeds
Broccoli	5-7 weeks before May 10th
Cabbage	5-7 weeks before May 10th
Corn	4-5 weeks before May 10th
Cucumber	3-4 weeks before May 10th
Eggplant	6-8 weeks before May 10th
Lettuce	4-6 weeks before May 10th
Spinach	4-6 weeks before May 10th
Okra	6-8 weeks before May 10th
Pepper	6-8 weeks before May 10th
Pumpkin	3-4 weeks before May 10th
Tomato	6-8 weeks before May 10th
Watermelon	3-4 weeks before May 10th
Zucchini	3-4 weeks before May 10th

Good Luck and Happy Planting!



Clematis - How well do you know them?

Clematis are long-lived perennial vines and they have an important role to play in any flower garden. As they scramble up trellises, climb over arbors and thread themselves through other plants, clematis weave a rich tapestry of color and texture. There are many different clematis to choose from and they come in a wide range of heights, bloom times, flower forms and colors. Rather than choosing a variety on impulse, it's worth taking a closer look so you know what to expect. While there are compact cultivars that grow just 3 feet tall, other clematis can reach 20 feet or more. Flowering times can be late spring, summer or fall, with re-blooming types flowering both early and late in the season.

Flower styles also vary from big, star-like singles to frilly doubles, delicate miniatures and even lovely bell-shaped blossoms. And then there's color!



Options include white, pink, red, burgundy, lavender, deep purple and even yellow. If you have the space, take a tip from British gardeners and consider planting two or more different varieties side by side. This will give you an ever-changing display of different flower styles, colors and bloom times. Some are very fragrant! Vines climb in several different ways. Some have twining stems (like morning glories) or tendrils (like sweet peas). Others have adhesive pads (like ivy) or clinging stem roots (like climbing hydrangeas). Clematis use their leaf stems, which are able to coil like the tendrils of a pea vine. These twining leaf stems are relatively short and can only wrap themselves around something that's less than about 1/4-inch in diameter. This is important to remember when it comes time to providing a trellis.



Clematis are long-lived, and they don't like to be moved, so choose the planting site carefully. The ideal location should have well drained soil that's rich and loamy. If possible, find a spot where the root zone will stay relatively cool. In most cases, you can count on nearby plants to shade the soil.

If the planting area is more open, plan to mulch the soil with shredded leaves or compost, keeping the mulch a few inches away from the stems.

To maximize flower production, try to plant your clematis in full sun. Though most varieties will grow in half-day sun, they won't produce as many blooms.

Here are a few places to consider planting clematis. Against a wall with a trellis, with another vine (such as a climbing rose), over an arbor or pergola (attach wire mesh or trellis if needed), on a free-standing trellis or yard art, around a lamp post or mailbox (attach wire mesh) or in a container with a mini trellis.

The root system of a clematis is wiry rather than fibrous. One or even two-year-old plants are smaller than most perennials, but this is normal. Be very gentle when handling the plant, as the vines are brittle and can be easily broken.

Dig a generous hole, add compost and mix well. Position the crown of the plant (where the roots meet the stem) 1" to 2" below the soil surface. Backfill the hole and water deeply to settle the roots. Water regularly the first year. You can expect your plant to spend its first year getting established, with blooms coming in year two.



Surrounding the young plant with a cylinder of wire mesh near the base, will help protect it from nibbling mice, rabbits, and voles. Even though the plant won't reach its full height the first year, it's important to provide a trellis right from the start. There are some types of clematis that have a bushy growth habit, but most are climbers. As with other climbing plants, the growing end of the vine is on a mission, always searching for something new to grab onto. When a vine can't find anything to grab, the end stops growing and will die back. Providing the right type of support from the start helps the plant look good and grow well. Clematis vines can break very easily. Older stems look woody but will crack if they're bent. Young

stems appear to be supple but are actually brittle. This makes it difficult to rescue a plant that begins to flop midseason. To avoid heartbreak, make time in late spring and early summer to corral wandering stems and tie-in top-heavy growth.

One of the simplest trellises for a clematis is a wire grid with openings that are between 1" and 4" in diameter. Black or green poly-coated animal fencing is strong and long-lasting.

First year clematis vines should be given a "training" trellis. Flexible wire mesh, such as chicken wire, works well. Anchor this mini trellis to the ground behind the plant and then attach it securely to the permanent trellis.



Pruning your clematis will increase its vigor and improve flower production. Officially, every clematis cultivar should be pruned according to a specific pruning style. Keeping track of which cultivar should be pruned in which way can be confusing. So what follows is an easier approach.

For clematis that produce most of their new growth on last year's vines, limit your pruning to maintaining the desired shape and remove dead or weak stems. The best time to prune these plants is late summer, right after they bloom.

If your clematis sends up most of its new growth from the base of the plant, it's a type that sets flowers on current year vines. These plants can be cut back each year in early spring, to a height of 12-18".

Also, you won't need to do any pruning for the first year or two, so you'll have time to see how the plant grows and can then prune accordingly.

Once your new clematis is established, you can enjoy it for many years to come!

Remember, when buying a clematis, read and keep the label. It will have the information you will need, such as common name, cultivar, color, fragrance and height. If you have the name, you can always google it to find out its care and pruning needs.





Lasagna Rolls

YIELD: Serves 6 PREP TIME: 25 minutes
 OVEN: 450°F COOK TIME: 50 minutes

Ingredients: Sauce

2 Tbsp. butter 1/4 tsp. salt
 4 tsp. flour 1/8 tsp. ground black pepper
 1 1/4 cups milk Pinch of ground nutmeg

Ingredients: Filling

1 (15-ounce) ricotta cheese
 1 (10-ounce) pkg. chopped spinach, squeezed dry
 1 cup grated Parmesan
 3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, chopped
 1 egg, beaten 3/4 tsp. salt
 1/2 tsp. ground black pepper
 12 lasagna noodles 1 to 2 Tbsp. olive oil
 2 cup marinara sauce 1 cup shredded mozzarella
 2 Tbsp. grated Parmesan

Sauce: Melt butter in saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and whisk for 3 minutes. Whisk in milk. Increase heat to medium-high. Whisk until sauce simmers and is thick and smooth. Whisk in salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Set aside.

Filling: In medium bowl, mix ricotta, spinach, 1 cup Parmesan, prosciutto, egg, salt, and pepper.

Noodles: Add a tablespoon of oil to a large pot of boiling salted water. Boil the noodles until just tender but still firm. Drain. Arrange noodles in a single layer on a parchment paper.

Assemble: Butter 9" X 13" glass baking dish. Pour sauce over bottom of dish. Spread 3 tablespoons of filling over each noodle. Start at one end, roll each noodle like a jelly roll. Set the rolls seam side down (without touching each other), on top of the sauce in the dish. Spoon 1 cup of marinara sauce over the lasagna rolls. Sprinkle the mozzarella and 2 tablespoons of Parmesan on top. Cover tightly with foil. Bake at 450°F for 20 minutes and the sauce bubbles. Uncover and bake another 15 minutes until the cheese on top becomes golden. Let stand for 10 minutes. Heat remaining marinara sauce in saucepan and serve alongside roll ups.



Do you remember when?

Back in the lower grades, the school Valentine's Day party! The day you sat the decorated shoe box everyone made during class, on the corner of your desk! Waiting for all the valentines to be passed out. Waiting for the decorated heart shaped cookies and the valentine heart candies to be passed out. Excited to see how many valentines there would be in your box! You picked out each valentine to match the person you were giving it to. It always warmed your heart to open and read them. Oh how great it was to be a kid!!



I hope all of you still have a Valentine's Day Sweetheart. That special someone you have shared your life with. You may not be able to go out to dinner this year, but you can always surprise that special one with an at home candlelight dinner! The meal doesn't really matter, it's the thought. Showing your loved one how much you care!



If this past year has taught us anything, it is how precious life is. How family and friends are everything! No one knows how long you will be on this big blue earth. So take each day as it comes and live it to the fullest! Send Valentine's Day cards to your kids, grandkids and other family loved ones. Or, give them a call or video chat! Valentine's Day is that special holiday for Love! Let's all share the Love!

Wishing all of you a Happy Valentine's Day!!



February UP COMMING EVENTS



- February 6, 2021 – 8:00am Gardening in the Air (webinar series) registration open on January 11
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/gardening-air-webinar-series-0>
- Friday, February 19, 2021 – 10 am and 3 pm Siouland Garden Show (Free Webinar Series) Please join us for 12 virtual sessions that will be held at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Friday's in February and March. Sessions will start at 10 a.m. on February 19th. Register with the link below.
<https://www.sioulandgardenshow.org/>
- International Master Gardener Conference will be virtual this year. It will be held September 12-17, 2021 Follow these two links for more information.
[About](#) | [Registration opens April 5](#)

February GARDENING TO DO LIST



- If you have been storing bulbs, corms, or tubers, check them to make sure that they are neither rotting nor totally drying out.
- Begin to start pruning fruit trees while still dormant. Now is also the time to do any grafting.
- Carefully check your house plants for scale, aphids and spider mites. If found they can be controlled with an application of insecticidal soap.
- Start planning your spring garden. Make a graph to help. Send for and start browsing gardening catalogs. Make a list of what you will need and place your order early.
- Continue to care for your Poinsettias, Amaryllis and Holiday cacti. Remember not to over water them. You will be able to plant them outside during the summer months, and hopefully be able to make them re-bloom next Holiday season.
- When you have a free day and it's not too cold, organize your garden shed or garage. If you haven't used it in the last 3 to 5 years, think about letting it go. Totes are good for storage, keeping things dry

and away from mice. Clear ones that you can see through work best!

- Plan a trip to Lauritzen Gardens (Omaha, NE), Reiman Gardens (Ames, IA) or the Botanical Center (Des Moines, IA). A trip to one of these indoor oasis can lift your sprit on cold or snowy days.



Resources for Horticulture information Iowa State University Publications

PM 874	Starting Garden Transplants at Home
PM 534	Planting and harvesting times for Garden vegetables
RG 307	Clematis
RG 215	Gardening in Iowa Zones
PM 1595	Houseplant Insect Control
PM 780	Pruning and Training Fruit Trees
RG 502	Pruning Grapevines
PM 0453	Fruit Cultivars for Iowa
PM 607	Suggested Vegetable Varieties for the Garden
RG 316	Poinsettia Care
RG 328	Growing Amaryllis
RG 308	Growing Holiday Cacti

Horticulture Publications on-line

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/ListCategories>

ISU Hotline Links and Numbers

Hotlines available for all

Iowa Concern 800-447-1985 Financial questions, legal education, stress counseling, crisis/disaster resources and referral (24 hrs - all days)

Beginning Farmer Center 877-BFC-1999 Program to match beginning and retiring farmers (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Teen Line 800-443-8336 Personal and health-related information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

Iowa 2-1-1 211 Resource referral for housing, health, food, family, transportation, employment, education, and legal assistance (24 hrs - all days)

Hot lines available for Iowa Residents Only

AnswerLine Toll-free: 800-262-3804 Local: 515-296-5883

Questions relating to home and family (9 am-noon & 1-4 pm)

Iowa Healthy Families 800-369-2229 Health information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

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