

## **Horticulture Hints**

*February 2020*

Despite a warm January, I hope your gardens survived the freeze at the end of the month. We actually did have freezing temps, but just one night. It got down to 30 degrees. And I think, only a few hours. It has lately been uncharacteristically breezy, drying things out more than usual. But the resulting dehydration serves the purpose of keeping freeze damage to minimum. I think we made it out OK. We'll just have to wait and see what February and March bring us.

Speaking of March, (as you are being reminded ad nauseum) the plant sale is quickly coming up, so don't forget to get your 'homegrown' into pots. Doing so now will allow them to get their roots established so they look their best when the day (March 28) gets here. Plus, the customer can then plant quickly after purchase, and stress to the plant will be lessened if they are established in the pot.

February is one of those transition months: warm and wonderful one day, cold and bitter(ish) the next. The threat of freezing temperatures is always in the wings, but days are lengthening. Many seeds can be planted at this time. Start indoors, and when those warm days occur, place them outside in bright light. Be sure to bring them in again before nightfall. Cabbage, broccoli, tomatoes and peppers don't always do well germinating in the ground, and so, do well when started in this way. Corn, cucumbers, squashes and melons, however, will do better if they are started in the ground, so you will want to wait until the ground warms up a bit.

This month is also a great time to take a look at your trees in anticipation of hurricane season. No, I haven't forgotten that it doesn't start until June 1, but if you take a careful look now, you can anticipate possible problems and you have time to get them taken care of before potential damage to your home occurs. Look for damaged or diseased limbs that may be susceptible to storms. Check for hollow areas in limbs and trunks that may indicate that the tree is weakened. Young trees need to be checked for proper growth. Most young trees need to be trained to a central leader. This means keeping one main shoot with good side branches. Competing shoots need to be removed or cut back to keep the straight leader.

When those warm and wonderful days occur and you want to get outside, there is plenty of pruning that will need to be done. Now is the time to check shrubs and bushes before the growing season gets really started. Remove dead portions, along with any branches that cross each other. You can help direct the direction of growth by trimming stems back to a bud that is pointed in the direction you want it to go. If you desire denser growth in a shrub, pinch back the tips of shoots with your fingernails or hand pruners.

Ornamental grasses are best cut back before they start to green up again. They don't need to be cut back every year, but if you see significant brown in the bunch, cut it back

by 2/3. The whole bunch will thank you with a lovely show when warm weather arrives for real.

Around Valentine's Day is also a traditional time to prune roses. Remove dead or declining stems, and cut the plant back by 1/3 to 1/2 in height. Remove all small twiggy growth from within the main stems. For climbing roses, you should only remove dead or declining portions. And here's something else I learned about climbing roses while doing research: if it's not blooming very much, it could be because it's growing too vertically; that is, stretched straight up. To get more blooms, train it in a more horizontal direction. Climbing roses only bloom on terminal growth. Growing straight up, they will only bloom at the top. But if you train it horizontally, this encourages lateral growth off the main stem; therefore, more flowers on the terminal ends of the lateral growth. I've included a picture of a climbing rose new to my garden, called Parade. Believe me, I'm looking forward to seeing this lovely thing bloom, and will be training it in a horizontal direction in order to get as many as possible. And after you're done pruning your roses, you will also want to fertilize all roses before the warm weather causes them to start growing.

Happy Valentine's Day to all! Make sure that someone knows you love them!