



INDIANA CONNECTION

MONTH-BY-MONTH GARDENING TO-DO LIST

A Purdue Extension
Yard and Garden Calendar

BY B. ROSIE LERNER



JANUARY

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Keep holiday poinsettias and other plants near a bright window. Water as top of soil becomes dry.
- Increase humidity around houseplants by grouping plants together, placing them on a pebble-water tray or running a humidifier.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Check young trees for rodent injury on lower trunks. Prevent injury with hardware cloth or protective collars.
- Keep road and sidewalk salt away from plants. Construct a screen of burlap, if necessary, to keep salt spray off plants.
- “Leaf” through nursery catalogs or visit websites and make plans for landscape and home orchard additions.
- Early spring-flowering trees and shrubs such as forsythia, crabapple, flowering quince, and flowering dogwood can be forced for early indoor blooms by placing cut branches in water in a warm location.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Sketch your garden plans on paper, including what to grow, spacing, arrangement and number of plants needed.
- Order seeds and plants as early as possible for best selection.
- Wood ashes from the fireplace can be spread in the garden, but don't overdo it. Wood ashes increase soil pH, and excess application can make some nutrients unavailable for plant uptake. Have soil tested to be certain of the pH before adding wood ash.

FEBRUARY

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Most houseplants require less water in the winter because growth is slow or stopped. Check the soil for dryness before watering.
- Move houseplants to brighter windows, but don't place plants in drafty places or against cold windowpanes.
- Check stored produce and flower bulbs for rot, shriveling, or excess moisture. Discard any damaged items.
- Early blooms of spring-flowering bulbs can make good gifts for a sweetheart. Keep these plants in a bright, cool location for longer-lasting blooms. Forced bulbs make poor garden flowers and you should discard them as blooms fade.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Choose appropriate plant species and cultivars, and begin drawing your landscape plans.
- Cut branches of forsythia, pussy willow, crabapple, quince, honeysuckle, and other early spring-flowering plants to force them into bloom indoors. Place the branches in warm water, and set them in a cool location.
- Check mulches, rodent shields, salt/wind screens, and other winter plant protections to make sure they are still in place.

- Prune landscape plants (except early spring bloomers) that should be pruned after flowers fade. Birches, maples, dogwoods, and other heavy sap bleeders can be pruned in early summer to avoid the sap flow, although bleeding is not harmful to the tree.
- Delay pruning fruit plants until you can assess winter injury.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Order seeds before it's too late for this year's planting.
- Sketch your garden plans. Remember to include plants to replace or replant crops that you will harvest in spring or early summer.
- Prepare or repair lawn and garden tools for the upcoming season.
- Start seeds indoors for cool-season vegetables so they will be ready to transplant to the garden early in the season. You should start broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage seeds five to seven weeks prior to transplanting.

Test leftover garden seed for germination. Place 10 seeds between moist paper toweling or cover with a thin layer of soil. Keep seeds warm and moist. If fewer than six seeds germinate, then purchase fresh seed.



MARCH

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Begin fertilizing houseplants as new growth appears. Remove spent leaves and flowers to improve appearance and encourage more blooms.
- Start garden seeds indoors for transplanting outdoors later in spring.
- Prune, repot, and clean houseplants as needed.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Prune trees and shrubs (except those that bloom early in spring) while plants are still dormant. If you are concerned about winter injury, delay pruning until after dieback; you can assess desiccation injury as plants come out of dormancy.
- Plant new trees and shrubs as soon as the soil dries enough to be worked. Plant bare-root plants before they leaf out. Soils may be exceptionally wet as winter snows thaw.
- Fertilize woody plants if needed before new growth begins but after soil temperatures reach 40.
- Remove winter coverings from roses as soon as new growth begins. Prune out dead canes and fertilize as needed. Delay pruning into live canes until after you can assess winter injury.

- Apply superior oil spray to control scale insects and mites when the tips of leaves start to protrude from buds.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Plant cool-season vegetables and flowers as soon as the ground has dried enough to work. Do not work the soil while it is wet; wait until it crumbles in your hand. If the soil forms a solid ball when you squeeze it, it's still too wet.
- Gradually harden-off transplants by setting them outdoors during the daytime for about a week before planting.
- Follow last fall's soil test recommendations for fertilizer and pH adjustment. It's not too late to test soil if you missed last year.
- Start the seeds of warm-season vegetables and flowers indoors. In northern and central Indiana, wait until the end of March or early April. Transplant seedlings to the garden after the danger of frost has passed. To find the average date of a frost in your area, consult maps provided by the Indiana State Climate Office.
- Remove old foliage from ornamental grasses and perennial flowers.
- Watch for blooms of early spring bulbs, such as daffodils, squill, crocus, dwarf iris, and snowdrops.
- Remove old asparagus and rhubarb tops, and side-dress the plants with nitrogen or manure. Plant or transplant asparagus, rhubarb, and small-fruit plants.

APRIL

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Start seeds of warm-season plants (including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, marigolds, zinnias, and petunias) indoors for transplanting later to the garden.
- Harden off transplants started earlier in spring before planting outdoors. Gradually expose the young plants to outdoor conditions of wind, brighter sunlight, and lower moisture.
- Apply fertilizer to houseplants according to label directions as days grow brighter and longer and new growth begins. Foliage plants require relatively high-nitrogen fertilizer, while blooming plants thrive on formulations that are higher in phosphorus.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Plant a tree in celebration of Arbor Day. You should plant bare-root stock before new top growth begins. You can plant balled and burlapped and containerized stock later in spring.
- Apply a prebloom, multipurpose orchard spray to fruit trees.
- Remove winter coverings from roses, but keep mulch nearby to protect them from late freezes. Prune and fertilize as needed.
- Apply pre-emergent herbicide to control crabgrass in lawns. Approximate application dates are late March to mid-April in southern

Indiana and mid-April to early May in northern Indiana. Exact timing varies each year with weather conditions. For more precise application timing based on Growing Degree Days (GDD), visit Michigan State University's GDD Tracker. Enter your ZIP code and select "Crabgrass Pre." The target GDD window for crabgrass prevention is 250-500.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Plant seeds of cool-season crops directly in the garden as soon as the soil dries enough to be worked. When squeezed, soil should crumble instead of forming a ball. Cool-season crops that can be direct-seeded include peas, lettuce, spinach, carrots, beets, turnips, parsnips and Swiss chard.
- Plant transplants of cool-season crops, such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi and onions.
- Plant or transplant asparagus and rhubarb crowns. For best plant establishment, do not harvest until the third year after planting.
- Allow the foliage of spring-flowering bulbs to remain in place after blooms fade. Leaves manufacture the food reserves, which are then stored in the bulb for a repeat showing next year.
- Plant hardy perennials, such as daylilies and delphiniums.



MAY

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Many indoor plants can be moved to shady locations outdoors but only after the danger of frost has passed. Plants will dry out more often outdoors, so keep a close eye on soil moisture. Sinking the pots in soil will help slow down moisture loss.
- Now is a good time to take cuttings of houseplants to increase a collection or share with friends. Root cuttings in media, such as vermiculite, perlite, or potting soil. Roots grown in water tend to be weak from lack of oxygen and do not adjust well to planting in soil.
- Fertilize houseplants according to label directions. Foliage plants require relatively high nitrogen fertilizer; flowering houseplants respond best to fertilizer high in phosphorus.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Prune early spring-flowering trees and shrubs after flowers fade.
- Plant balled-and-burlapped or container nursery stock, and water thoroughly.
- Follow a spray schedule to keep home-orchard crops pest free. While trees are in bloom, use fungicide sprays without insecticide to avoid injuring bees. Follow label directions. More information is available in *Managing Pests in Home Fruit Plantings* (Purdue Extension publication ID-146-W).

Thin apple tree fruits, if needed, about three weeks after petal fall. Apples should be about 8 inches apart. Mother Nature may have taken care of thinning fruit set this year!

- Apply fungicides to roses to control diseases such as black spot.
- Purdue turf experts recommend that if you are going to fertilize your lawn in May, apply $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 pound of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 square feet with a product that contains 50 percent or more of slow-release fertilizer. Try to schedule the application prior to a rain or irrigate following application to move the fertilizer off leaf blades.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Plant frost-tender plants after the danger of frost has passed for your area. This includes warm-season vegetables (such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and vine crops) as well as most annual flowers and tender perennials (such as cannas, gladiolus, dahlias, tuberous begonias, and caladiums).
- Pinch chrysanthemums and annual flower plants to keep them compact and well-branched.
- Thin seedlings of early-planted crops such as carrots, lettuce, spinach, and beets to their proper spacing.
- Harvest early plantings of radishes, spinach, and lettuce.



JUNE

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Indoor plants will require more frequent watering and fertilizing as they increase their summer growth.
- You can move houseplants outdoors to a shady location, but pay close attention to their watering needs.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Prune spring-flowering shrubs after blooms fade.
- Apply fungicide to prevent and control black spot on roses.
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs. Water deeply every seven to 10 days when rain is lacking.
- Propagate deciduous shrubs (such as forsythia, lilac, pyracantha, and weigela) by stem tip cuttings.
- To keep the lawn green and growing, water as needed to supply a total of 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week. If left unwatered, lawns will turn brown and become dormant during extended hot, dry spells, but will green up again when conditions are more favorable.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Discontinue harvesting asparagus and

rhubarb around mid-June to allow foliage to develop and store food reserves for next year's harvest. Fertilize and water when dry to promote healthy growth.

- Mulch to control weeds and conserve soil moisture after soil has warmed. You can use many materials, including straw, chopped corncobs, bark chips, shredded paper, and grass clippings.
- Blanch (exclude light from) cauliflower when heads are just 2 inches in diameter. Tie leaves up and over the developing head.
- Start seeds of cabbage, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, and cauliflower for fall garden transplants.
- Plan now for your Halloween pumpkin. Determine the days to harvest for the particular cultivar you want to plant (usually on the seed packet) and count backward to determine the proper planting date.
- Remove cool-season plants, such as radish, spinach, and lettuce, because they will bolt (that is, form seed stalks) during hot summer weather.
- Remove the tops of spring-flowering bulbs only after they have yellowed and withered.
- Supplement natural rainfall (as needed) to supply a total of 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week to the garden.



JULY

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Closely watch houseplants that have been set outdoors. They need more water than they did indoors. They can dry out rapidly in hot, summer breezes.
- Propagate houseplants by taking cuttings from vigorously growing plants. Place the cut end in rooting media (such as perlite, vermiculite, or peat moss soil mix). Enclose in plastic and keep out of direct sunlight.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Keep newly established plants watered during dry weather. Allow water to penetrate deeply into soil rather than sprinkling frequently and lightly.
- Apply mulch around young plants to help conserve soil moisture and control weeds.
- Do not plant bare-root or ball-and-burlap stock at this time of year. Container-grown plants still may be planted, but only if you can keep them well watered.
- For those fortunate growers who have a good crop this year, prop up fruit tree branches that are heavily loaded with fruit.
- When watering lawns, apply 1 to 1.5 inches of water in a single application per week. Frequent, light sprinklings will encourage roots to stay shallow, making them more susceptible to drought.

- Mow grass one-half inch higher than usual during the dry, summer months to help conserve soil moisture. Do not mow when the lawn is under severe drought stress.
- Many Indiana trees are plagued by "lawnmower blight." Be careful to avoid nicking tree trunks while mowing.
- Don't remove clippings from the lawn unless grass is excessively tall or weedy. Clippings return some nutrients to the soil and do not add to thatch buildup.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Supplement natural rainfall, if any, to supply 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week in a single application.
- Start seeds of broccoli, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts to transplant later for a fall harvest. Harvest crops such as tomatoes, squash, okra, peppers, beans, and cucumbers frequently to encourage further production.
- Standard sweet corn is at its peak for only a day or so. Supersweet corn varieties maintain their peak quality for a longer period. Harvest when silks begin to dry and kernels exude a milky, rather than watery or doughy, juice when punctured.
- July is a good time to fertilize strawberries with 0.5 pound of actual nitrogen per 100 feet of row.
- The foliage of spring-flowering bulbs can be removed safely after it fades. This also is a good time to lift the bulbs for transplanting or propagation.

AUGUST

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Take cuttings from annual garden plants such as impatiens, coleus, geraniums and wax begonias to overwinter indoors. Root the cuttings in media such as moist vermiculite, perlite, peat moss or potting soil, rather than water.
- Order spring-flowering bulbs for fall planting.
- Cut flowers from the garden to bring a little color indoors, or dry for everlasting arrangements.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Check trees and shrubs that have been planted in recent years for girdling damage by guy wires, burlap or twine.
- Don't fertilize woody plants now. It stimulates late growth that will not have time to harden off properly before winter.
- Hand-prune and destroy bagworms, fall webworms and tent caterpillars.
- Prune out and destroy the raspberry and blackberry canes that bore fruits this year. They will not produce fruit again next year, but they may harbor insect and disease organisms.

- If weather turns dry, keep newly established plants well-watered. New plants should receive 1 to 1.5 inches of water every 7 to 10 days.
- Begin seeding new lawns or bare spots in established lawns in mid-August through mid-September.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Keep the garden well-watered during dry weather and free of weeds, insects and disease.
- Keep faded flowers pinched off bedding plants to promote further flowering and improve plant appearance.
- Complete fall garden planting by direct-seeding carrots, beets, kohlrabi, kale and snap beans early this month. Lettuce, spinach, radishes and green onions can be planted later in August and early September. Don't forget to thin seedlings to appropriate spacing as needed.
- Harvest sweet corn when kernels are plump and ooze a milky juice when punctured with your fingernail. If the liquid is watery, you're too early; if the kernels are doughy, you're too late.

SEPTEMBER

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Thanksgiving (or Christmas) cactus can be forced into bloom for the Thanksgiving holidays. Provide 15 hours of complete darkness each day, for instance, from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., for approximately eight weeks. Keep temperature at about 60-65 F. Temperatures of 55 F will cause flower buds to set without dark treatment.
- Store leftover garden seed in a cool, dry place. A sealable jar with a layer of silica gel or powdered milk in the bottom works well.
- Bring houseplants moved outside for summer indoors before night temperatures fall below 55 F. Gradually decrease light to acclimate the plants and help reduce leaf drop. Check and control insects and diseases before putting these plants near other houseplants.
- Poinsettias saved from last year can be reflowered for this year's holiday by providing complete darkness for 15 hours daily from about Oct. 1 until about Dec. 10.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Fall is a good time to plant many container-grown or balled-and-burlapped nursery stock. Prepare a good-size hole, plant at the same depth it grew in the nursery and water thoroughly. Mulching will help protect against large fluctuations in soil temperature and moisture. Wrap young, thin-barked tree trunks to protect against frost cracks or animal damage but be prepared to remove the wraps by early spring.
- Do not be alarmed if your evergreens, particularly white pine and arborvitae, drop

some older needles. All evergreens shed needles at some time, but not all at once as deciduous plants do.

- To promote the lawn's recovery from summer stress, apply high-nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of 0.5 to 1 pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- Reseed bare spots or new lawns using a good-quality seed mixture. Seeding in late summer allows the turf to maximize its establishment and rooting prior to the next summer's heat and drought.
- September and October are appropriate months to apply broadleaf weed killers to the lawn. Be sure to follow all label directions, and choose a calm day to prevent spray drift.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Plant radishes, green onion sets, lettuce and spinach for fall harvest.
- Plant, transplant or divide peonies, daylilies, iris and phlox only if you can apply irrigation during dry spells.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs beginning in late September. Planting too early can cause bulbs to sprout top growth before winter. However, allow at least four to six weeks before the ground freezes for good root formation.
- Dig tender bulbs, such as cannas, caladiums, tuberous begonias and gladiolus, before frost. Allow to air dry, and store in dry peat moss or vermiculite.

OCTOBER

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Pot spring-flowering bulbs to force into bloom indoors. Moisten soil and refrigerate 10 to 13 weeks. Transfer to a cool, sunny location, and allow an additional three to four weeks for blooming.
- Water indoor plants less frequently, and discontinue fertilizer as plants slow down or stop growing for the winter season.
- Keep poinsettia in complete darkness for 15 hours each day — for example, between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. — for eight to 10 weeks until red bracts begin to show.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Keep plants, especially newly planted stock, well-watered until ground freezes.
- Harvest root crops and store in a cold (32 F), humid location. Storing produce in perforated plastic bags is a convenient, easy way to increase humidity.
- Harvest mature, green tomatoes before frost and ripen indoors in the dark. Warmer temperatures lead to faster ripening.
- Asparagus top growth should not be removed until foliage yellows. Let foliage stand over winter to collect snow for insulation and moisture.

- Have soil ready to mound roses for winter protection. Do not mound or cover roses until after leaves drop and soil is near freezing, usually late November or early December.
- Strawberry plants need protection from winter's extremes, but applying winter mulch too early may cause crowns to rot. Apply winter protection when plants are dormant but before temperatures drop below 20F, usually late November or early December.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- Remove plant debris from the garden to protect next year's plantings from insect and disease buildup. Compost plant refuse by alternating layers of soil, plant material, and manure or commercial fertilizer.
- Have garden soil tested for fertilizer needs every three to five years.
- Plowing and incorporating organic matter in fall avoids the rush of garden activities and waterlogged soil in spring. Soils prepared in the fall tend to warm faster and allow earlier planting in spring.
- Dig tender garden flower bulbs for winter storage. Gladiolus corms should be dug when leaves begin turning yellow. Caladiums, geraniums and tuberous begonias should be lifted before killing frost. Dig canna and dahlia roots after a heavy frost. Allow to air dry, then pack in dry peat moss or vermiculite, and store in a cool location.
- Complete planting of spring-flowering bulbs.

NOVEMBER

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- As houseplant growth slows, apply less fertilizer and water.
- If plants are dropping many leaves, move them closer to sunny exposures, such as west- and south-facing windows. Artificial lights may be needed to supplement particularly dark rooms.
- Pot spring-flowering bulbs with tips exposed to force into bloom indoors. Moisten soil and refrigerate 10 to 13 weeks. Transfer to a cool, sunny location, and allow an additional three to four weeks for blooming.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Prevent rabbit and rodent feeding damage by erecting physical barriers, such as metal mesh (one-fourth inch) hardware cloth. Pull mulch a few inches away from the trunk, as the mulch provides a warm winter home for rodents. Chemical repellents also are available, but their effectiveness is temporary and not foolproof.
- Prevent frost cracking (or sunscald) by wrapping trunks with commercial tree wrap or painting the south- and southwest-facing sides of the trunk with white latex outdoor paint. Young, thin-barked trees such as maples and many fruit trees are especially susceptible. Be sure to remove the tree wrap by early spring to prevent overheating of the bark.

- If you are planning to order a "live" Christmas tree, prepare its planting hole before the soil freezes. Mulch the area heavily to prevent freezing, or dig the hole and put fill in a protected, nonfreezing area such as a garage or basement.
- A November application of fertilizer can help keep lawns green into winter and boost early spring recovery. Apply one-half to 1 pound actual nitrogen, per 1,000 square feet of lawn. See "Turfgrass Management: Fertilizing Established Cool-Season Lawns" for more information on lawn fertilization.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- If frost hasn't taken your garden yet, continue harvesting.
- Remove crop and weed plant debris from the garden and add to the compost pile. This will help reduce the carryover of diseases, insects and weeds to next year's garden.
- Fall tilling, except in erosion-prone areas, helps improve soil structure and usually leads to soils warming and drying faster in the spring. This allows crops to be planted earlier.
- Dig and store tender flowering bulbs, and keep in a protected location.
- Complete planting of spring-flowering bulbs.

DECEMBER

Home *(indoor plants and activities)*

- Extend the lives of holiday plants such as poinsettias and Christmas cactus by placing them in a cool, brightly lit area that is free from warm or cold drafts.
- Houseplants may not receive adequate light because days are short and gloomy. Move plants closer to windows, but avoid placing foliage against cold glass panes. Artificial lighting may be helpful.
- If you are forcing bulbs for the holidays, bring them into warmer temperatures after they have been sufficiently precooled. Bulbs require a chilling period of about 10 to 12 weeks at 40 F to initiate flower buds and establish root growth. Precooled bulbs are available from many garden suppliers, if you did not get yours cooled in time. Then provide two to four weeks of warm temperature (60 F), bright light and moderately moist soil to bring on flowers.

Yard *(lawns, woody ornamentals and fruits)*

- Prevent bark splitting of young and thin-barked trees, such as fruit and maple trees. Wrap trunks with tree wrap, or paint them with white latex (not oil-based) paint, particularly on the south- and southwest-facing sides.
- Protect shrubs such as junipers and arborvitae from extensive snow loads by tying their stems together with twine. Carefully remove

heavy snow loads with a broom to prevent limb breakage.

- Protect broadleaves, evergreens or other tender landscape plants from excessive drying (desiccation) by winter sun and wind. Canvas, burlap or polyethylene plastic screens to the south and west protect the plants. Similarly, shield plants from salt spray on the street side.
- Provide winter protection for roses by mounding soil approximately 12 inches high to insulate the graft union after plants are dormant and temperatures are cold. Additional organic mulch such as straw compost or chopped leaves can be placed on top.

Garden *(flowers, vegetables and small fruits)*

- To protect newly planted or tender perennials and bulbs, mulch with straw, chopped leaves or other organic material after plants become dormant.
- Store leftover garden chemicals where they will stay dry, unfrozen and out of the reach of children, pets and unsuspecting adults.
- Once the plants are completely dormant and temperatures are consistently below freezing, apply winter mulch to protect strawberries and other tender perennials. In most cases, 2 to 4 inches of organic material such as straw, pine needles, hay or bark chips will provide adequate protection.