

January 27th, 2025

In this Issue:

- Houseplant Care
- Starting Seeds
- Forcing Spring Blooming Shrubs
- February Garden Calendar

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The Grapevine

Houseplants Care

What a month January has been with the colder weather and snowy temperatures. This winter it's been very easy to curl up indoors and hibernate through this last month. The one bright side for me has been the houseplants I have indoors. Right now I have several bouganvilleas blooming to provide a spot of color against the snow outdoors and the green always reminds me that spring will come, even if it's -3 degrees outdoors.

January can be a time of transition for houseplants. By now any systemic insecticide you may have applied has worn off and insects maybe showing up. As you water, inspect any plants that were outside or near open windows during the growing season. Remember to check the back of leaves and where the leaves attach to the stems for spidermites, aphids, or mealy bugs. This is also an excellent time to wash any dust that maybe accumulating on the leaves of your plants off by sticking them in the shower and spraying the plants down. This shower can serve multiple purposes from removing the dust to washing any excess salts out of the soil and even washing off any insects you might have found.

While it maybe tempting to start fertilizing again, it's best to wait. Our houseplants are still in a somewhat dormant stage, even if they are under grow lights, and don't need the fertilizer yet. Wait till sometime in late February to start fertilizing at ¼ the recommended rate. Once March arrives you can start fertilizing again on a regular basis as growth increases with daylight length. Hopefully your houseplants will thrive this winter. Happy Growing!



Starting Seeds at Home

Over the last few weeks, I have been sorting through my garden seeds to be ready for this year's gardening season. While we are still a few weeks away from starting most of the vegetable seeds we can start many of our annual flower seeds along with some cole crops right now. Here are some tips to help you get started this spring including the basics of seed starting and how to troubleshoot some common issues you might encounter.

Timing is one key to being successful when starting seeds for your garden. Most of our vegetable varieties will need to be started six to eight weeks and flowers up to twelve weeks before you plan to plant your plants outside in the garden. Most of our vegetables and flowers will need to be held inside till after the threat of frost is over; I usually recommend planting cold-sensitive plants outdoors around the end of April or the first part of May since our average last frost is in mid-April. If we follow the recommended start times we would start planting cool-season vegetables the first weekend of February, warm-season vegetable seeds the first weekend to mid-March, flowers should be started the first weekend of February, and vining crops would be started at the end of March or planted directly in the ground. Be sure to check the packaging of the seeds before planting.



Once you have figured out when to start your seeds, providing enough light is the next big issue to address. Seedlings need at least 12 hours of light to prevent long leggy growth. Unfortunately, we can't get that using sunlight from a window alone so some supplemental light will be necessary. Luckily seedlings do not require high-quality expensive light sources to grow successfully. Seedlings need a high quantity of light, but not high quality. I have found that using fluorescent light fixtures with one warm or daylight bulb and one cool light provides seedlings the correct light spectrum to thrive. The bulbs need to be positioned four to six inches above the tops of the seedlings to provide enough light to prevent stretching. As the seedlings grow, move the lights up higher. I usually use a timer for my lights to have them on for 14 hours to make it easier to manage the light system.



Once you have the basics such as when to start the seeds and have the lights ready to go, the next step is what to grow the seedlings in. Any container can be used from garden trays to plastic cups, to recycled plastic containers, to paper pots as long as it has good drainage so the plants don't drown. Make sure to use a high-quality seed starting mix or peat pellet to plant your seeds in. Don't use soil from the garden to start seeds in as there can be weed seeds, diseases, or insects in the soil that could damage or kill your seedlings. I usually use the peat pellets to start my seeds in but that is what I've had the best luck with based on my watering schedule and the varieties I'm starting. Try a couple of different options to see what works best for you. Once you have planted your seeds, use a plastic dome or bag to ensure the seed mix doesn't dry out while the seeds are sprouting. A heat mat under the seed mix can also help speed up the germination process by keeping the soil warm. Using bottom heat can also help encourage uniform germination so the seedlings are all about the same age for care and transplanting.

After the seedlings have started to germinate, it is time to remove the plastic dome or covering. While the seeds need moisture to germinate, too much moisture can lead to disease issues and seedling death. Continue to keep the soil damp for the first few weeks after the seedlings have emerged. It's easy to kill them by letting them get too dry since they have a very small root system. Once the seedlings have 2-4 small leaves it's time to transplant them into a larger pot or container and continue to let them grow until it's time to transplant them outside. During this time continue to water them regularly and fertilize at half strength to prevent any deficiencies. Don't over-fertilize as this can lead to long, leggy growth and weak transplants.

Starting seeds at home is one of my favorite wintertime activities. I love to watch the plants grow from tiny seeds to fruitful plants that provide food for my family. Over the weekend I plan to start my broccoli and some flower seeds so I've been making sure my area is set up and ready to go. I'll talk more about how to transition seedlings outside in a future article as we get closer to that time. Happy growing!

Forcing Spring Flowering Plants

One of my favorite ways to bring spring inside is using blooming bulbs, but a close second is forcing spring-blooming shrub branches inside. The smell of lilacs and fuzzy blooms of pussy willows always brought a smile to my face and chased away the winter blues. Forcing branches to bloom inside can be a simple way to brighten up your indoor space and remind you that spring will soon be here.

Almost any spring-blooming tree or shrub can be used in this fashion. Some of the most common are forsythia, redbuds, lilacs, willows or pussy willows, dogwood, crabapples, flowering cherry, flowering quince and magnolias are all common flowers that can be forced inside. To be forced inside shrubs, much like bulbs, need a period of winter dormancy to get the plants to break bud and bloom. Usually, this is approximately 6 weeks, but that depends on the shrub as the earlier a plant blooms, the earlier you can force the branches inside. Forsythia are among the easiest and earliest plants to force inside and will usually bloom 1-3 weeks after you bring them inside while Magnolias or crabapples can take 4-5 weeks to bloom once brought inside.



It is best to prune your shrubs when the temperatures are above freezing because the branches and buds are more pliable and they will transition to the warm temperatures inside the house. Choose branches that are at least 12" long and less than 1/2" in diameter that have a large number of bloom buds (bloom buds typically are round and fat while leaf buds are long and narrow). If you pruned the shrub last fall after buds were set that shrub will have few blooms and the branches won't perform well. Remember that any branches you prune from your shrubs could reduce the amount of blooms your shrub will have when it normally blooms. If the plant you are pruning is smaller I would pick branches from the back or sides of the plant and only take a few from one spot.



After you bring the branches inside, prune the branches to a slightly longer length than you want them to be when they are blooming and place in a vase or bucket with warm water. Remember that a mixture of lengths of branches will provide the best display. You will need to change the water every couple of days to prevent bacteria growth and will need to prune the branches after a water change (that's why you should leave them longer originally). Place the vase in a warm room out of sunlight and check the branches every few days to see if the buds have broken open. Once the buds have started to open bring the vase into the main room to enjoy! The flowers will last longest in cooler temperatures out of the direct sunlight

but you can expect the blooms to last approximately a week. If the branch hasn't broken bud within 5 weeks of being brought inside it's best to discard it. It was probably too early for that species to be forced inside.

Forcing flowering shrubs inside is a fun activity to do with kids, grandkids or even just for yourself. If doing this with kids, you could turn it into a science experiment and have them guess which type of shrub will bloom first. This activity is easy but produces a big impact, especially if you are suffering from the winter blues. Remember to change the water often and discard the branches when they are done blooming

Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:

February 5th- Maximizing Irrigation Efficiency with Drip Irrigation

March 5th- Establishing a Native Prairie at Home

Upcoming Events:

February 8th at 9:30 am
Sustainable Landscaping with Rain Barrel Clinic at Andover Library

February 12th at 6 pm
Seed Starting Success at the Bradford Memorial Library

February 13th at 6 pm
Winter Blues and Winter Greens at the Andover Library

February 22nd at 9 am
Sustainable Landscaping with Rain Barrel Clinic at Butler Community Building

February Garden Calendar

Vegetables and Fruits

- Order seeds for spring planting
- Select varieties and order new fruit trees
- Take a soil test if one has not been done in the last five years
- Start broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage transplants
- **Prune:**
 - Fruit trees like apples, pears and cherries
 - Peaches and nectarines just prior to bloom time
 - Grapes, raspberries and blackberries
- Incorporate manure or compost into the garden
- Avoid working the soil when it is wet

Flowers

- Start seeds for transplanting in the spring
- Check fall-planted perennials and water if needed
- Watch for frost heaving of tender perennials and cover if needed
- Replenish winter mulch around roses and other plants
- Check bulbs in storage and discard if rotted

Lawns

- To prevent lawn suffocation, rake fallen leaves
- Review lawn service contracts and make changes
- Tune up and repair the mower to get a jump on the season
- Avoid injury to the lawn when soil is frozen by keeping foot traffic to a minimum

Trees and Shrubs

- Check for rabbit damage on young trees and shrubs
- Water fall planted trees, shrubs, and evergreens if the soil is dry and not frozen
- Apply dormant oil for control of scale and mites
- **Prune:**
 - Begin spring pruning. Do not prune spring flowering trees and shrubs until after bloom
 - Cut twigs and branches of spring shrubs to bring indoors and force for a splash of spring color
- Carefully remove snow from limbs with a broom
- On warm days, prepare garden soil for early planting

Miscellaneous

- Check plants for insects, mites, or other problems and treat as needed
- Withhold fertilization until spring arrives
- Remove dust build-up on plants by placing them in the shower and washing them off or using a soft cloth to wipe off the leaves
- Water as needed, avoid letting roots set in water
- Keep plants out of hot or cold drafts



#KSTATEGARDENHOUR

K-STATE GARDEN HOUR

2025 New Year Launch

First Wednesday of the Month

12:00 PM- 1:00 PM CST

January 8th*- Sowing Success: Research-Based Gardening for Beginners **(second Wednesday)*

February 5th- Maximizing Water Efficiency Through Drip Irrigation

March 5th- Establishing a Native Prairie Stand at Home

The K-State Garden Hour is a free webinar series hosted by K-State Research and Extension horticulture staff across the state. We hope you'll join us on the first Wednesday of each month as we discuss new and relevant gardening topics. The presentations will be given live from Noon to 1:00 pm CST with a 45-minute presentation and 10-15 minutes for questions and answers. Sessions will be recorded and posted to the website after each event. Your one-time registration will allow you to participate live in any of the featured presentations within the 2025 K-State Garden Hour series.

***January Webinar postponed one week, until January 8th, due to the federal holiday.**



Register Here!



Please register for this free Zoom Webinar at:
ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour



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