

DECEMBER CHECK LIST

VEGETABLE GARDEN

- Keep an eye on stored winter squash, cabbage, fruits and root vegetables. If they're not storing well, use immediately. Note and correct needed changes in the storage area.
- Try to do your soil building. Add sulfur, gypsum, leaves, compost, etc. to improve next years garden. A soil test may help if you are struggling with soil problems.
- Sheet compost in the garden with straw, alfalfa, chips, sawdust, residues from the kitchen, or any organic materials available to you. The freezing-thawing action of the soil will help break down the humus.
- A blanket of shredded cornstalks, hay, straw or manure will keep garden soil warm and bring worms closer to the upper soil. Melting snow and rains will saturate the soil, raising the water table instead of running off frozen soil. Six to twelve inches of garden mulch is not too much.
- Short season vegetables and cold weather crops can still be started in protected cold frames. Keep protection materials handy for severe drops in temperature.
- Winter is the time to remember and record last season's failures and successes, to improve crop production next season.
- Study maturity times for vegetables you may want for next year's garden. Plan for a continuous harvest, instead of harvesting all at once.
- Add needed garden tools and supplies to your Christmas list.

ORCHARD AND FRUITS

- After the ground freezes, apply a 4-6 in. mulch of compost or aged animal manure, well back from the trunks. This is good for both orchard and berry patches, to protect tender roots and to supply an early feeding when spring thaws and rains wash nutrients into the soil. This is especially helpful for young and newly transplanted plants.
- If you haven't mulched the strawberry bed, it's time to apply a 4-6 in. layer of straw.

TREES AND SHRUBS

- Watch shrubs for signs of stress due to lack of moisture or windburn. Water when ground isn't frozen, for deep moisture penetration. Be especially mindful of evergreens and newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Brush snow off shrubs and young trees, to prevent the weight from breaking or bending branches, or splitting tree trunks.
- Be sure all plants that need winter mulch are protected.
- As soon as the ground thaws, or if a chinook moves in, plant potted Christmas trees.
- When selecting Christmas trees, remember spruce trees lose their needles more readily than fir, pine or Douglas varieties.

HOUSEPLANTS

- Keep potted Christmas trees watered and cool till holiday use. Set outdoors as soon as possible after holiday use.
- Water poinsettia when soil is dry, and grow in bright window. Move to room with night temperatures of 60 degrees or less.
- Ohio State University has disproved the theory that poinsettia plants are poisonous. The plant is not intended for human/animal consumption, but a 50 lb. child would need to eat 500 bracts to equal or surpass experimental doses, at which no toxicity occurs.
- Try growing citrus seeds for a fun winter project. These will need bright light, and night

temperatures of 40-50 degrees.

- Don't become alarmed if your houseplant leaves begin to yellow and drop. This isn't lack of water or fertilizer, but the plant's natural rest period. Problems may result if plants are overwatered or overfertilized. Cut back fertilization to once a month, and be careful with watering. It's easy to overdo it with winter's shorter, cooler days. Moisture meters are helpful in checking soil moisture, and humidifiers are helpful to counteract winter home dryness.