

Gardening Almanac for the Plateau

December

Weather – Average Temperature and Rainfall:

The average rainfall for December is 6.16 inches. The average maximum temperature is 47 degrees F., and the average minimum is 27 degrees F.

Activities:

- Remember to keep fresh birdseed and suet available for the winter birds. They need the suet to help insulate their bodies from the cold weather.
- If you prefer a fresh Christmas tree, here are some tips: After determining that you have the right size, make sure the limbs are strong enough to hold ornaments and lights; make sure the needles are not brittle by running your hand down a branch – fir and pine trees hold needles better than spruce trees; store the tree outside in a sheltered area until you're ready to decorate it, and then saw off (on a diagonal) the base about one inch above the original cut and placed in a bucket of water; while still outside, the branches can be sprayed or misted to help prevent the tree from drying out; before bringing the tree in the house, make a fresh, straight cut across the trunk an inch above the diagonal cut and place it in water.
- Your Christmas tree may require 2 – 4 quarts of water each day. Be sure the water level never drops below the trunk, because if that happens, a seal will form and the tree won't absorb water.
- Keep your tree away from heat sources, such as electric heaters, fireplaces, lighted candles, etc. Also, check the light cords and replace any that are defective.
- After the holidays, the tree can be used as a feeding and sheltering station for winter birds, or it can be cut up and added to the compost pile, or it can be chipped into mulch for your yard.
- Poinsettias like bright, indirect, natural daylight. No part of the plant should touch a cold windowpane. The best method of watering the plant is to place it in the sink and water it until water runs out the drainage hole. Never let the plant sit in standing water. It doesn't need fertilization while in bloom. Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are NOT poisonous. However, mistletoe and holly berries are toxic and should be kept away from children.
- Check houseplants regularly to see if they need watering, and reduce or eliminate fertilizing houseplants during the winter.
- Environmentally, spreading sand is best to use on ice sidewalks, steps and driveways. If a de-icer is needed, urea nitrogen fertilizer is good if used in moderation.
- For inside bloom, plant paperwhite narcissus bulbs in a shallow container of stones and keep the bottom of the bulbs moist. Keep the container in bright sunlight and when they bloom, enjoy the wonderful fragrance.
- After the season's last mowing, run the mower until it is out of fuel (old gas can turn to varnish and damage the engine) and store the mower properly.
- Garden tools can be cleaned by putting sand and some oil in a large bucket, and then sliding the tools in and out of the sand. This will not only clean them, but also will apply a light coat of oil to prevent rusting.
- Fall-planted evergreens need water; when the ground is frozen, they can't get the water that they need and may dry out and die.

Wildlife:

Many birds can be seen during this month, including:

Red bellied woodpecker, Hairy woodpecker, Downy woodpecker, Pileated woodpecker, Muscovy duck, Mallard duck, Canada goose, American goldfinch, Song sparrow, Carolina wren, Tufted titmouse, Northern junco, White breasted nuthatch, Mourning dove, House finch, Carolina chickadee, Wild turkey, Eastern bluebird, Blue jay, Red shoulder hawk, Red tail hawk, European starling, American crow, Northern cardinal, Gray catbird, Ruby crowned kinglet, Great blue heron, American robin and Junco.

Also, you may see white tailed deer, fox, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, opossum and ground hogs.

Flowers:

Flower blossoms are pretty much gone, but you may see pansies, ornamental grasses and snapdragons. Inside the house you may see Christmas cactus, poinsettia and African violets in bloom.

This information has been created by the Cumberland County Master Gardeners Association, Crossville TN