

Gardening Almanac for the Plateau

January

Weather Average Rainfall and Temperatures:

January is normally the third wettest month of the year on the Plateau with an average rainfall of 5.52 inches. Rainfall averages cover records for the last 30 years. Keeping in mind that temperature ranges are broader than the average, we report here only the average maximums and minimums for the month. For January, the average maximum temperature is 44 degrees F., and the minimum is 24 degrees F. Temperature averages cover records over the last 30 years.

Activities During the cold months on the plateau, planning activities for the coming spring is a welcome diversion. This is an excellent time to draw maps of your property. With several copies you can plot out projects for the spring such as flowerbeds and vegetable garden plots.

As seed and plant catalogs arrive in your mail, take a special look at some new plants and consider them for your garden this year. Black Velvet petunia is a true deep black blossom with bright green leaves. A second one is Angelmist spreading angelonia (also called summer snapdragon), which is very durable and heat-tolerant and comes in dark purple, light blue and white. Fireworks pennisetum is very heat and drought tolerant, and is an updated version of the very popular purple fountain grass, with hot pink leaves highlighted with dark burgundy stripes down the center. The fourth new plant to consider is Incrediball hydrangea that has 12-inch pure white blossoms against bright green leaves. It grows no more than 3 feet tall and is very winter-hardy and disease-resistant. Lastly you may consider the Bloomerang purple lilac. It is a reblooming compact plant with an intoxicating fragrance that will last for 3 months, not just weeks. It grows 4 to 5 feet tall and wide.

Think about structures to add to the beauty of areas you have already planted. Draw paths through your planted and grassy areas and invite people to walk on them. Look for benches, birdbaths of an unusual nature, and interesting outdoor sculptures to place along the paths or at the ends of them.

As you sit indoors, look out your windows and enjoy your work from the year before. In winter, you can see the structure of deciduous shrubs, and seed heads which were left for the birds to enjoy. Without winter, we would not appreciate other season nearly as much.

After your Thanksgiving or Christmas cacti are through blooming, give them a sunny location indoors. Fertilize every 4 to 6 weeks with a complete houseplant fertilizer, and water when the soil feels dry. These plants should be potted in a soil medium that has some moisture retention, but also has good drainage. The best mix is peat moss, commercial potting soil and builder's sand.

Hopefully you are composting. Remember that it's not only rich in nitrogen, phosphate and potassium, but also contains a wealth of minerals and trace elements necessary for healthy plants. It also loosens clay soil, binds sandy soil, helps soil retain moisture, and is the one thing guaranteed to attract earthworms that till, aerate and fertilize soil. If you're just starting a compost pile, begin piling up all organic matter you can find. Dead leaves, grass clippings, straw or hay, kitchen leftovers and scraps (but not meat products), weeds, pine needles, vegetable cooking water, tea, tea bags, dryer lint, hair, bread scraps, stale beer and cola (sugar is an activator), used paper towels and napkins (helps retain moisture), cardboard tubes from toilet paper or paper towels.

If Mother Nature is unleashing lots of wind, the moisture could be sucked from the earth. If this happens, it's well to hand water newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials, as well as bulbs and evergreens.

Watch for blossoms on Leather-leaf mahonias and on Lenten roses late this month.

When the ground is frozen or dry, plants cannot replace lost water. Leaves and branches may dry or appear scorched. Keep watering plants until the ground freezes. After freezing weather arrives, mulch above the root area to stabilize the soil temperature. Two or three inches of mulch reduces the depth of freezing and allows plant roots more soil moisture in winter.

Indoor activities can consist of repotting houseplants -- potting up or down as needed. Some indoor plants can be propagated for gifts for friends or for sales. Winter is also time to get on the Internet at the many garden and plant sites to plan for the future.

Wildlife Many birds will come to feeders if you keep them supplied with wild bird food, especially oily black sunflower seeds. Birds you may see during January include:

Red-bellied woodpecker, Hairy woodpecker, Downy woodpecker, Pileated woodpecker, Flicker, Ring-neck duck, Ruddy duck, Muscovy duck, Mallard duck, Gadwall duck, Lesser scaup, Bufflehead, Canada goose, American goldfinch, Song sparrow, Carolina wren, Tufted titmouse, Mourning dove, Purple finch, Carolina chickadee, Wild turkey, Eastern bluebird, Blue jay, Red-tailed hawk, European starling, American crow, Nuthatch, Cardinal, Robin, House finch, Junco, Brown thrasher, Cedar waxwing, American bald eagle, American kestrel, Yellow-rumped warbler, Red-winged blackbird, Quail, Killdeer, Black-eyed junco and Red-headed woodpecker.

You may also see deer, fox, squirrel, skunk, opossum and rabbits.

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