

# This Month in the Garden

## December Tasks

Your gardens may be going dormant but that doesn't mean you must be deprived of all the fun you have gardening. Here are some things to consider as the holidays allow.

- Plan ahead for next spring. What kinds of improvements can you make to your garden to make it easier to maintain, prettier, better for local fauna, more environmentally friendly, or whatever you desire? Now, is a great time to make the plans for what you will do, research how to do it, and figure out how to fit it into your budget. The [Earth-Kind® Landscape Planner](#) can help.
- Place orders for trees and seeds you want to plant in mid- to late winter or early spring. Ordering now ensures you can get what you want. Many local nurseries are happy to work with you on this.
- As the weather cools, birds and squirrels might have less food supplies. Help local wildlife feed through the winter by visiting a local farm or pet supply and get feeders and some feed to show your love.
- Take care of your gardening tools. Your tools will last longer and you will be more productive if they are maintained properly. Review [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's Garden Tool Care and Maintenance](#) to learn how.
- Now that your lawn mower is being used less frequently (or not at all!), it is a good time to do some routine lawn mower maintenance. Learn more about [lawn mower care and safety](#).
- Rake up fallen leaves and put them into your garden beds as natural mulch as described in these [Earth-Kind® principles to handle yard waste](#).
- Plant hardy trees and shrubs. No, it is not too late to plant woody trees and shrubs if you don't plant them immediately before a freeze and you water wisely. Plants still need water during the winter months, but must not have too much water, which could damage the roots if the temperature dips too low. Use the [Earth-Kind® Plant Selector](#) to help choose the best ones for your garden.
- If the weather is dry, you may need to water your yard and gardens occasionally.
- Put a home composter on your wish list for holiday gifts. This is a cost-efficient way to create your own compost and an Earth-Kind® method to rid yourself of home and garden waste. Learn [how to compost](#).
- Remove annual plants that have been damaged by the cold weather (and put them in your compost pile!) This will give a neater appearance to your garden and make room for more plantings later.
- Do you have a fallow garden bed waiting for spring planting? Consider sheet mulching. This is a form of cold composting that protects the ground from weed seeds and helps build the soil. Learn about [this easy time-saving technique and its benefits](#).



Birds (and squirrels!) will enjoy this buffet.

- If you have pecan, peach or plum trees, this is the time to spray for pests while the trees are dormant. Learn more at [this homeowner's guide](#).
- If you have any fruit trees, nut trees, or vines, you should remove the dead fruit, called fruit mummies, from the plant and the ground beneath it. These mummies are sources for fungi, pests, and diseases that may affect the plant later. This includes [grapes](#), [apples](#), [peaches](#), [plums](#), [blackberries](#), and many other fruit-bearing plants.
- Gather up materials to protect immovable plants during freezes. Learn [how to protect your plants](#).
- Have a safe and happy holiday season!

And here is one big task you should not do during the winter months: prune! Unless there are some obviously dead branches that need to be trimmed, most pruning should wait. You especially do not need to trim crape myrtles. The drastic pruning that is frequently perpetrated on these beautiful plants is called "crape murder" by many gardeners. Learn more about ["crape murder."](#)

## December Color in Fort Bend County

You might be surprised to learn there is a berry that is a Texas Superstar. Meet the Natchez Blackberry. This thorn-less vine produces abundant large, firm berries. The best time to plant these root cuttings is now, in early winter.

These perennial plants have biennial fruit. The fruit grows on the previous year's canes and then that cane dies while more canes are produced. Here is more information:

- Grows in full sun
- Canes grow 6-to-8 feet long
- Works well containers and usually requires a trellis to keep canes and fruit off the ground
- Prune dead canes and regularly remove fruit for best production.



*Photo courtesy of texassuperstar.com*

For more information about these Texas Superstars, visit [Natchez Blackberry](#).

For more information about Texas Superstar® plants, visit <http://texassuperstar.com/>.

Certain dependable December blooms are sure to keep you smiling. Consider these.

- [Pansy](#): These lovely little charmers come in a variety of colors and are sure to perk up a place in your garden. Bonus: the blooms are edible!
- [Amaryllis](#): This perennial bloom is easily grown in pots and comes in a variety of colors. [Here](#) is a source for more information about this beautiful flower.
- [Poinsettia](#): Although many people think of poinsettias as seasonal plants, they are actually beautiful perennials. Consider purchasing one this month and then transplant it into your garden to enjoy its blossoms again next December.
- [Christmas cactus](#): Don't be fooled by the name of this plant! My mother's Christmas cactus bloomed whenever it wanted and it wanted to bloom frequently throughout the year. It thrives indoors in pots, but does need to be re-potted as it grows.



Pink and White Amaryllis

You are invited to visit the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' Demonstration Gardens at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office located at 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg to be inspired by what is blooming there. Take a family-friendly, self-guided tour through the gardens during daylight hours, open seven days a week. Be sure to take a copy of the garden maps and garden information located throughout the gardens.