

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. Find [seed suppliers](#).
- As the weather cools, birds and squirrels might have fewer food supplies. Help local wildlife through the winter by visiting a local farm or pet supply and get feeders and seed. Learn about [feeding local wildlife](#).
- Take care of your gardening tools. Your tools will last longer and you will be more productive if they are maintained properly. Review the [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's a good time to do some routine lawn mower maintenance. Also, brush up on safety rules for lawn mowers and other power tools at [Lawn Mower Safety](#).
- Rake up fallen leaves and put them into your garden beds as natural mulch, or compost them as described as described in these [Earth-Kind® principles to handle yard waste](#).
- Put a home composter on your wish list for holiday gifts. Not only will your yard waste avoid the landfill, but some of your household waste will be put to good use as well. This is one of the best ways to add organic matter and nutrients to your gardens and yard. Learn [how to compost](#).
- 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.



Birds (and squirrels!) will enjoy this buffet.



Green compost

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. Learn [more](#).
- 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. Learn about [garden cleanup](#).
- Do you have an area of grass that you want to turn into a garden bed? Consider sheet mulching. This is a form of cold composting that smothers grass and weeds, protects the ground from weed seeds, and helps build the soil. Learn about [this easy time-saving technique and its benefits](#).
- Are you purchasing a live Christmas tree this year for your home? Get tips for tree selection, recutting, tree stands, care, and tree removal and disposal from [this Purdue Extension Guide](#).
- 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 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](#).
- Find when to expect the first freeze by checking the average first frost date in [this interactive map](#).
- While you are preparing to protect your plants, you might also gather the supplies you need to protect your home. Learn [more](#).
- Pruning can be done at any time of the year; however, recommended times vary with different plants. To learn all about how to prune (and when), visit [Proper Pruning Techniques](#).
- 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!](#)
- Have a safe and happy holiday season! Protect your furry friends with this information about [holiday hazards for pets](#). Also, in case of freezes, you will want to know how to protect your pets. Learn about [cold weather animal safety](#).

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 thornless 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 in containers and usually requires a trellis to keep canes and fruit off the ground
- Prune dead canes and regularly remove fruit for best production.



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

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

Consider these dependable December bloomers that are sure to keep you smiling.

- [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.
- [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

The Fort Bend Master Gardeners demonstration gardens are currently undergoing renovation but feel free to visit our demonstration gardens for ideas. We do request that you keep your distance from Master Gardeners as they work in the gardens (for their safety and to make sure they keep working). For more information, look on our website at <https://fbmg.org/demonstration-gardens/>.

