

## Things To Do In Your Garden This Month

\*Clean power tools of all plant material and dirt. Replace worn spark plugs, oil all necessary parts and sharpen blades.

\*Check fruits, vegetables, corms and tubers that you have in storage. Sort out any that show signs of rot and dispose of them.

\*Be sure not to store apples or pears with vegetables. The fruits give off ethylene gas which speeds up the breakdown of vegetables and will cause them to develop off-flavors.

\*African violets do well when potted in small pots. A good general rule is to use a pot one-third the diameter of the plant. Encourage African violets to bloom by giving them plenty of light. They can be in a south window during dark winter months. They bloom beautifully under fluorescent lights.

\*After the ground freezes, mulch small fruit plants such as strawberries. One inch of straw or leaves is ideal for strawberries.

\*Bring out the bird feeders and stock them with bird seed for the birds. Remember to provide fresh water for them too.

# IN THE DIRT

## Make a Holiday Wreath



*NEBLINE Newsletter Article by Mary Jane Frogge, UNL Extension Associate*

A wreath is an attractive, easy-to-make decoration for the upcoming holiday season. Materials needed to construct a wreath include pruning shears, scissors, wreath frame, No. 22 or 24-gauge florist wire, wire cutter, and evergreen branches. Decorative materials, such as ribbon, bows, pine cones, holly, various fruits, and ornaments, may be used to finish the wreath.

When selecting a wreath frame, individuals can choose from box wire, crimped wire, styrofoam, and straw frames. An ordinary wire coat hanger may also be fashioned into a small wreath frame. Frames, florist wire, and other materials can be purchased at craft or hobby stores.

Evergreen branches can be obtained from the home landscape. A small amount of careful and selective pruning will not harm the trees and shrubs. Greens may also be purchased from garden centers, florist shops, and Christmas tree lots or farms. Additional materials, such as pine cones and bittersweet, can be purchased or collected outdoors.

A 15-inch diameter wreath frame is ideal for most home decorations. Cut the greens into 4–6 inch sections. Begin by firmly attaching the end of the wire roll to the frame. Place a small bundle of greens on the frame; then fasten the base of the twigs tightly to the frame with 2 or 3 turns of the wire. Position the second bundle of greens so as to cover the base of the first group.

Continue this procedure around the frame, placing the groups close together to produce a thick, full wreath. Tuck the base of the final bundle of greens beneath the foliage of the first group and fasten it to the frame. Decorate the wreath with a bow, cones, ornaments, etc. Wire each item separately and fasten it to the frame. Finally, attach a wire hanger to the top of the wreath frame.



The wreath is now ready for hanging.

When constructing wreaths, use only fresh greens. Needles on old material will be dry and brittle. Fresh material will have a strong fragrance and pliable needles.

Wreaths hung outdoors should remain fresh for 3-4 weeks. The average life of an indoor wreath, however, is about 7-10 days. Indoor wreaths should be promptly removed when they become dry. The life of an indoor wreath can be prolonged by hanging it up only during special holiday occasions. Carefully place the wreath in a plastic bag and store in a cool location, such as a garage, during the remaining time.

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## Starting Seeds Indoors



For many home gardeners, it's fun to get a head start on the upcoming garden season by starting seedlings indoors. Growing quality seedlings indoors requires high quality seeds, a well-drained, disease-free growing medium, containers, proper temperature and moisture conditions, and adequate light.

The growing medium should be porous and free of disease pathogens. Home gardeners can use commercially prepared soilless media, such as Jiffy Mix, or prepare their own by mixing equal parts garden soil, peat, and perlite. Homemade soil mixes should also be pasteurized before use.

Various containers can be used to germinate and grow transplants. Gardeners can purchase flats, trays, pots, compressed peat pellets, and other commercial products. Previously used flats, trays, and pots should be cleaned and disinfected before use.

The size of the seeds largely determines the type of container and sowing method. Fine seeds, such as begonias and petunias, are typically sown in flats or trays. After germination, the seedlings are transplanted into individual containers. Large seeds, such as marigolds and tomatoes, can also be germinated in flats. However, they are often sown directly into individual containers.

When sowing seeds in flats or trays, fill the container with the growing medium to within 1/2 to 1 inch of the top. Firm the medium, water thoroughly, then allow it to drain. Fine seeds are usually dusted on the surface of the seedbed, then lightly pressed into the surface of the growing medium. Large seeds should be covered with growing medium to a thickness of one to two times their diameter. After sowing the seeds, water the medium by partially submersing the container in water. When the surface becomes wet, remove the container from the water and allow it to drain. Watering from below prevents the washing of seeds on the surface of the medium.

When sowing seeds into individual containers, plant two or three seeds per container. Place the containers in a flat and water.

The correct indoor sowing dates for several popular flowers and vegetables are:



- late January - geranium;
- late February - impatiens and begonia;
- early March - cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower;
- mid-March - pepper, eggplant, petunia, and salvia;
- late March - tomato, marigold, and zinnia;
- early April - muskmelon, watermelon, squash, and cucumber.



If unsure of the sowing date, check the seed packet.

To insure a uniform moisture level during germination, cover the container with clear plastic wrap or place in a clear plastic bag. Poke a few holes in the plastic to allow for some air circulation.

Set the container in bright light, but out of direct sunlight. A medium temperature of 70 to 75 degrees F is adequate for the germination of most flowers and vegetables. Remove the plastic covering or bag as soon as germination occurs.

Once the seeds have germinated, move the seedlings to an area with slightly cooler temperatures and direct sun or place under fluorescent lights. Transplant the seedlings growing in flats into individual containers when the second pair of "true" leaves appear. Large-seeded plants that were sown two to three seeds per container should be thinned to one seedling per container. Destroy the weak seedlings by cutting them off with a razor blade.

Short, stocky, dark green seedlings are the best quality transplants. For best results, grow seedlings under fluorescent lights. It isn't necessary to have "grow lights" or a fancy light stand. A standard fluorescent shop fixture with two 40-watt tubes (one cool white and one warm white) works fine. The fluorescent lights should be no more than 4 to 6 inches above the plants. They should be lit 12 to 16 hours per day.

Thoroughly water the seedlings when the soil surface becomes dry to the touch. Fertilize weekly with a one-quarter strength houseplant fertilizer. Finally, harden or condition the seedlings outdoors for several days before planting them into the garden.

Source: Lancaster.unl.edu