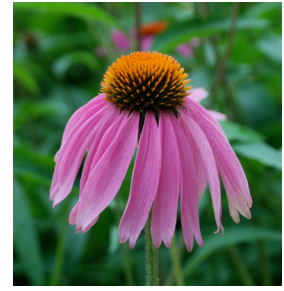


January Gardening To-Do



- Cut up your Christmas tree and use the boughs for mulch over tender plants. Or tuck the boughs into pots and windowboxes. Pretty, and you'll save on a collection fee.
- Use calcium chloride, rather than sodium chloride, on your drive and walks. It's less harmful to plants. Or use sand or even kitty litter, in a pinch.
- Make on-line and mail-order purchases early. Supplies of the most popular items tend to start running out in March or so.
- Look at your houseplants. If they're struggling, it's probably time to pitch them. (A great excuse to buy a new one.) Otherwise, give them a good rinse, trim off brown or problem parts, and top off the soil with fresh potting soil.
- Don't fertilize houseplants this month. With less daylight and therefore growth, they need less food.
- Boost humidity around houseplants. They really need it this time of year. Misting has been shown to be ineffective, but a tray filled with pebbles and a quarter-inch or so of water is. Also, turn up your humidifier.
- Check on any forced bulbs in your fridge. Water to keep soil lightly moist, as needed. When shoots are 1/2-inch high, put them in the sunniest spot you have. Supplement with a grow light, if possible.
- Check on any bulbs or corms. If you dug glads, tuberous begonias, and other tender bulbs up last fall, uncover and examine them. They should be firm and healthy looking. If they're shriveled or mildewed, pitch them.
- Start seeds of slower-growing plants, such as parsley, onions, and some perennials. Don't start other seeds too early (check the packet). The vast majority of seeds should be started 6 to 8 weeks before your area's last average frost date, which is roughly mid-March.
- Know your USDA Zone. Northern Iowa is roughly Zone 4, southern Iowa is roughly Zone 5. Go to <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html> for a map.

Notes
