

Horticultural Hints for February 2018

Good news about winter moths. Did you notice there were fewer winter moths about in January? Researchers have been releasing parasitic flies in several New England states. Along with the feeding of some native in-ground beetle on the winter moth pupa, the numbers are definitely down and that is great news for our oaks, maples, blueberries and many other trees and shrubs.



After the snow, gently remove snow from evergreens. A car's snow brush or a small broom can remove the snow without risking damage to the plant. Snow covering perennials and small shrubs will help protect them from sudden temperature changes, which are more deadly to plants than the cold.

Remember the birds. It has been a dreadful winter for the birds. Continue to put out fresh seed and suet. Remember also that birds need water. Put out a shallow dish next to your feeder. While you



may need to change it daily when temperatures are below freezing, it's one of the best good deeds you can do.



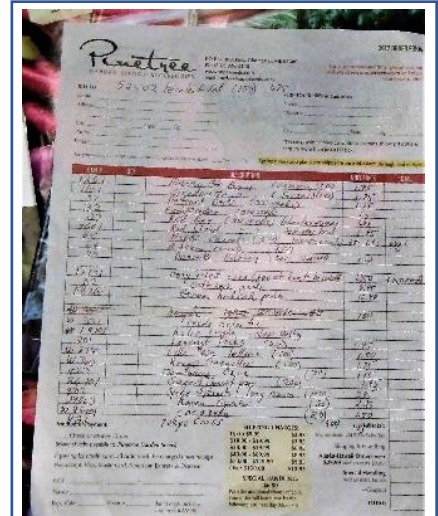
Winter pruning. Now is a good time to do your winter pruning. Start with any plant that has been damaged during earlier storms. If a tree is so damaged it needs to be removed, have an arborist do the work before the ground thaws in the spring. Next tackle fruit trees, grapes and evergreens to have them done before the spring growth spurt begins. Do not prune any spring or early summer bloomers—you'll be cutting off the flowers.

Time to cut branches to force indoors. Start with forsythia, witch hazel, and pussy willows; later look for quince and small branches from cherry trees to brighten your home.





Clean up your houseplants—spray or wipe smooth leaves with a damp cloth to remove dust, use a small brush to clean fuzzy leaves such as African violets which don't like to get wet. Clean leaves can take advantage of every bit of sunlight they get. Toward the end of the month, begin using a weak fertilizer solution for watering.



Resent florist Valentine's Day prices? Give a gift certificate to your gardener's favorite nursery and get thanked again when it's time to buy whatever the gardener is dreaming of growing this year.



Finish ordering seed, if you haven't already. If you chose flower or vegetable seeds that need to be started indoors, pay careful attention to how deep to plant, how much light is needed and the minimum and maximum temperatures for the seedlings. Before you start those seedlings, be realistic about the amount of attention you can devote to them until they are ready to go outdoors. Sometimes it is better to buy your garden seedlings from a reputable nursery in the spring.



Did you save dahlia or canna or gladiola bulbs? Check them now, discarding any that are decayed. And make note on the calendar of when you need to start them for summer bloom. Start tuberous begonias now.



Ice melting chemicals and road salt will soak into the ground during thaws where they will kill plants when they begin growing again in the spring. Instead of chemicals, use cat litter, sand or other non-toxic materials on sidewalks and driveways.