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# Nature's News & Notes

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***"PROVIDING BEAUTIFUL, HEALTHY & BALANCED LANDSCAPES"***

**We wish you and your family a Happy Thanksgiving. We sincerely hope you enjoy this time with friends and family.**

## Advantages of Winter Pruning of Trees



When trees lose their leaves during the Fall, our experienced staff is able to examine the growth structure and easily distinguish between live and dead wood. This allows for corrective pruning of poor growth characteristics. Winter pruning is often preferred because it is easy to visualize shaping when foliage is gone. Pruning during the dormant season invigorates many trees and shrubs because it leaves the plants with extra root and energy reserves that will support new growth on the remaining branches come Spring. Winter pruning limits the spread of diseases and lessens damaging wood boring insects from attacking the fresh cut sites. In fact, Black Pines should only be pruned in the Winter

to prevent borer attack. Ornamental trees should be pruned to remove competing branches. Cherries, Flowering Dogwoods, Flowering Crabapples etc., have a tendency to send branches in many different directions.

Tree branches are more vulnerable to breakage during the winter months. The wood hardens and becomes brittle. Snow and ice build-up on branches can also cause breakage and severe damage. Many times these trees overhang the house, driveway or power lines servicing the home. When large limbs or tree tops are broken in an ice storm, they can cause major damage and expense. Correct pruning techniques help to minimize these risks. Severe limb damage can also lead to the decline and loss of the tree's landscape value.

Proper pruning enhances the beauty of almost any landscape tree and shrub, while improper pruning can ruin or greatly reduce its landscape potential. Pruning, like any other skill, requires knowing what you are doing to achieve success. More trees are killed or ruined each year from improper pruning than by pests. Pruning essentially involves removing plant parts to improve the health, landscape effect, or value of the plant. It is wise to have a Certified Arborist check your property before the worst of Winter sets in to assess your property.

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#### GARDEN CHECKLIST

- Finish Fall clean-up
- Thoroughly water newly planted trees before ground freezes.
- Check for signs of potentially hazardous trees before winter: heavy deadwood, cavities, and exposed or damaged roots.
- Implement Winter anti-desiccant program.
- Begin dormant pruning.
- Finish tree and shrub fertilization.
- Keep lawns free of fallen leaves, which can smother grass.
- Make sure weak branches are supported by cables before snow and ice begin.
- Make sure your sprinkler system has been properly Winterized.
- Be sure your plants have been correctly mulched.



## Plant of the Month-Pumpkin

What else could be plant of the month?! After all, It is pumpkin pie season. The origin of pumpkin pie occurred when the first American colonists sliced off the pumpkin top, removed the seeds, and filled the insides with milk, spices and honey. The pumpkin was then baked in hot ashes. Pumpkins are believed to have originated in Central America. Seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico, dating back over 7000 years to 5500 B.C. There are conflicting reports and documentation as to whether pumpkins were a part of the first Thanksgiving meal of the Pilgrims and the Indians, or whether it was the second Thanksgiving celebration the next year. From that time forward, pumpkins have been, and continue to be a tradition at the Thanksgiving feast. We do know that pumpkins were a staple of the Indians long before the arrival of the pilgrims. Pumpkins are annuals and are related to such common crops as cucumbers, gourds and winter squashes, and they grow typically on vines. If you are thinking of growing your own keep in mind that Pumpkins prefer warm temperatures above 70 degrees during the day and no lower than 60 degrees at night. The vines also take up a lot of space. Pumpkins typically mature and give fruit within 90 to 120 days of being planted. Pumpkins range in size from less than 1 pound to over 1,000 pounds. Pumpkins are very versatile in their uses for cooking, from the fleshy shell, to the seeds, to even the flowers; most parts of the pumpkin are edible.

## Provide a Healthy Spring for Your Pond



Getting your pond ready for Winter really begins in the Fall and prepares your fish and pond for a healthy Spring. As leaves fall, it's time to cover the entire pond with netting. It's just about impossible to keep netting every leaf out by hand, and it saves a lot of time. The net is barely visible and is stretched and anchored on the sides of the pond. If you have a skimmer it's not as dangerous to go "without a net" but the skimmer's net should be checked and debris emptied out daily. A portion of the pond must be a minimum of 18" deep, preferably 25"-30", to protect fish from long cold spells. But even more dangerous than cold water is the buildup of toxic gases in a pond that is completely iced over for an extended period of time. Therefore, an aerator device should be placed at the bottom of the pond to keep a portion of the surface open to allow the pond to "breathe", disposing of toxic gases and adding oxygen. Leave the netting on for the Fall & Winter months assures you of a tidy pond come Spring and keeps out any unwanted critters. When it gets below 40°F then the main pump can be removed. All these efforts will pay off in the Spring with a healthier pond and healthier fish. Just because it seems like the pond will be "sleeping" for a while, doesn't mean it will look ugly. A frozen pond can be very beautiful, especially if you installed underwater lighting. The effect is awesome!

## Mice, Moles & Deer Oh My!



During the Fall and throughout Winter, trees & shrubs become a favorite target for rodents foraging for scarce food; the major culprits are voles (mice) which chew bark, roots and can girdle trees & shrubs. Tunneling from these pests can simply uproot the plant. This damage can disfigure a plant, slow its growth or lead to

death.

Moles are another rodent pest and are active in their deep underground tunnels year round. They don't directly damage planting areas and lawns; but when digging their tunnels push up plant roots and kill areas of lawn. Those mounds of soil you may see in your lawn or planting beds are from mole activity. The Star Mole (name for its star-like nose) feeds almost exclusively on earthworms, not grubs. While grub control is important for your lawn it will not prevent mole infestations.

Deer enjoy the 'buffet' your landscape supplies them with. While they are certainly beautiful creatures you may not feel quite that way when they destroy your valuable landscape plants. They are most active throughout the Winter as food sources in the woods become scarce.

Our skilled professionals can analyze your situation and provide real solutions to vole, mole and deer concerns. We have an effective, safe bait system for voles; a trapping and bait system for moles; can provide deer fencing; apply safe, effective deer repellants; as well as providing deer resistant plantings. Utilizing an integrated pest program can greatly reduce the damage to the health & beauty of your landscape.

## Creative Winter Landscapes



The trend toward providing year-round visual interest has expanded beyond color and texture. Attractive and functional winter scenes easily are enhanced through design elements such as arbors, gazebos, benches, stone walls, crack-resistant planters and lighting. Strategically placed landscape lighting fixtures can highlight pathways, accessories, plant groupings or the architectural sculpture of trees. Winter landscape

lighting provides more dramatic accenting because uplighting on empty branches and selected foliage creates better reflection and shadowing.

Enjoy the popular Winter pastime of bird watching.

Birds perform the valuable service of eating insects in warm weather and consuming weed seeds in the cold. While attracted to the basics of food, water, shelter and habitat in the winter, they seek adequate perching places in native shrub and tree species. Tube feeders generally attract smaller birds such as songbirds. Larger feeders, birdhouses and bird baths are additional hardscape accessories that add dimension and scale to the winter landscape.



## Putting Your Plants to Bed



Of vital importance is mulching plants to keep them protected through the Winter months. Failure to mulch landscape plants and evergreen shrubs may lead to serious winter root injury. Wait until they have gone dormant and the ground is starting to freeze, then put down the mulch. Protect small plantings including shrubs, perennials, cuttings and bulbs. Why mulch? It helps the ground temperature stay stable rather than thawing and re-freezing and from frost heave. It helps the soil retain moisture and protects roots against the cold. Mulch retains soil heat and keeps it from escaping, which in turn protects root systems. Initially, the soil under mulch does not freeze as deeply, so plants will continue to absorb water. Mulch helps evergreen shrubs go into winter with more moisture, so less damage will occur from drying out come spring. Finally, it is important not to pile too much mulch around plants. Excessive amounts of mulch piled around the stems of boxwoods, hollies, and other broadleaf evergreens can trap too much moisture. This could lead to root rot and other problems in the springtime. After applying the mulch, gently pull it away from the stems or trunks of the plants. Mulching too close to the trunk may provide optimum conditions for the development of cankers on the lower trunk or stems of woody plants. It also will provide a home for mice, which can chew the bark and girdle the stems. How much mulch? Two to four inches spread throughout the gardenbeds.

## Ask the Expert-Houseplant Pests



Seeing something crawling around your houseplants? First and the most important thing to do is remove the infected plant & move it to a place where it will be quarantined from all other houseplants. This is to prevent the spread of insects to other plants. There are several problem insects that tend to occur. Scale looks like tiny, brown, oval-shaped bumps visible on the plant leaves and stem. Mealy bugs can be found on stems, leaves, and flowers and produce white material that resembles pieces of cotton balls, making them very easy to spot. Spider mites are small insects, which appear as small white or red specks, usually on the undersides of leaves, forming webbing, like a spider's web around infected plants. White Flies are small, white, flying insects which can usually be seen on the undersides of leaves where they lay their eggs. Aphids (pictured) appear as small green or black insects, usually found on buds and new growth, and also secrete honeydew, a sticky, sugary substance. All of these insects do damage by sucking the juices out of plants.

The best treatment for small infestations is to use either Horticultural Oil or an Insecticidal Soap. These are effective and offer the advantage of very low toxicity or odor indoors. Both products require full contact with the pest insect to work. Be sure you get good coverage of the plant, thoroughly the leaves undersides. Keep the droplet size that is emitted from the sprayer small and fine. Oils and soaps both have the potential to

burn the plant's foliage so be sure to test the product on a small part of the plant first and wait a few days to see any phytotoxic effects before you treat the whole plant. Also, read the product label carefully and note plants known to have phytotoxic reactions. Repeat applications in 4-to-7-day intervals. Soaps and oils have no residual effect and if contact wasn't made to all the pests, they will continue to reproduce. Additionally, these products are not effective on all life stages (i.e. eggs). Multiple applications made over time will ensure that those insects eventually are treated at a susceptible stage. Three applications are often used to treat most pest problems. If choosing horticultural oil, be sure to use the recommended dilution for houseplants specified on the label, as many oils are sold for multiple purposes (such as outdoor Spring applications).

**We are now offering Winter Snow Plowing services.  
Please call for details.**

