

IN THE GARDEN: A Monthly Checklist of Tasks by Powell Gardens

January/February

- During dry, snow-less winters you may water on mild winter days above 55 degrees (F). Mound at least 10 inches of soil or compost around the base of tender roses after the ground freezes. Newly planted hardy shrub roses also benefit from this during their first winter.
- Do not prune back butterfly bushes and other tender shrubs such as chastetree, beautyberry, crape myrtle and blue mist spireas until new growth begins in spring.
- Crape myrtles have survived for several years now and many have become tree sized. Spray trunks with wilt-proof to enhance hardiness by a few degrees. (A severe winter is still destined to kill them back to the ground.)
- Do not prune ornamental grasses until mid-spring. The foliage and seed heads not only provide winter interest, but also help protect the plant through winter.
- Monitor deer and rabbit damage to woody ornamentals.
- Give gardening tools a good cleaning and sharpening.
- Review your garden diary and photographs to plan for next spring's additions.
- Plan and/or order plants.
- Plant annual poppies (California, Iceland, corn poppies, etc.) by distributing seeds over bare ground, such as over newly planted bulbs.

March

- Unwrap winter-wrapped plants after the ground thaws and mild weather arrives, by mid-March most years. Winter wrap left on trunks can promote rot, girdling and provide a spot for pests to hide.
- Do not remove burned leaves of evergreens such as hollies and magnolias damaged by long periods of excessive cold. Wait until new growth emerges and let the plant recover naturally.
- Remove plant cages before new growth entangles in the cage.
- Remove mulch from early bulbs and perennials, but keep it handy for that annual, severe late freeze. Most early bulbs are quite freeze resistant.
- Cool season annuals such as pansies, kales, cabbages, leaf lettuce, calendula, stocks, diascias and bachelor buttons can be planted as early as mid-March for spring color into May.

April

- Prepare planting beds, incorporating compost and fertilizer as needed.
- Now is the best time to divide and move most perennials.
- Prune spring-flowering trees and shrubs after flowering.
- Prune back tender shrubs (roses, butterfly bush, vitex, crape myrtles) to one-quarter inch above the area where new growth is budding. Angle your cut away from the emerging bud. Allow plenty of time for butterfly bush or crape myrtle to emerge from the roots after a severe winter.

May

- After spring bulbs bloom, let the foliage yellow before removing.
- Prune spring flowering trees and shrubs after their flowers have faded. This gives the plant a full season of growth to form new flower buds in late summer/fall for next spring's blossoms.
- Plant warm season (frost tender) annuals, tropicals and summer flowering bulbs when danger of frost is past. Remove cool season annuals as they fade.
- Incorporate plants that attract beneficial insects and pollinators into your garden and pledge to use fertilizers and pesticides wisely. (Visit our Butterfly Garden grand opening on May 31 for ideas).
- Trim or shear arborvitae, boxwood, juniper and yew hedges in late May.

June

- Watering: When hydrangea leaves droop, water them, along with rare shrubs and those that wilt easily. When viburnum leaves wilt, water all shrubs in the garden.
- Water containers every day during summer's heat. Fertilize weekly during active growth.
- Check garden plants regularly for signs of insect and disease problems; control only specific problems. Blanket spraying kills beneficial insects, too.
- In early June, check for bag worms and control accordingly. BT is recommended for organic control, which works only at the early stage.
- Make sure all plants and beds are mulched to help conserve soil moisture.
- Deadhead for extended flowering, tidiness and appearance.

July

- Keep watering! This month may require extra effort.
- Daylilies are in peak bloom. Purchase new daylilies now, while they are in bloom, so you can observe their vibrant colors and plant accordingly.
- Begin dividing bearded irises toward the end of the month and in early August.
- Remember to set lawn mowers on their highest setting during this season. The taller turf requires less watering and handles stress better. The only exception: diseased areas should be mowed lower to allow them to dry out.

August

- Do not fertilize trees and shrubs with high nitrogen fertilizer after early August. Fertilizing at this time promotes succulent growth, which is extremely susceptible to early freezes in fall. (Use fertilizers with a first number of "zero," which means it contains no nitrogen, to stimulate root growth, flower bud development and hardening off.)
- Finish dividing bearded iris in early August. Begin dividing daylilies.
- Sow seeds of cool-season annuals in early August.
- Begin planning for fall bulb planting; make catalog orders early to reserve the best varieties. Fall crocus, Colchicums, Madonna lilies, Snowflakes (*Leucojum*) and Sternbergia require early shipment and planting.
- Purchase and plant additional nectar-producing plants to attract butterflies—this is important for Monarchs that need flowers to fuel their migration, which begins at the end of the month and continues through October (see monarchwatch.org for "Monarch waystation" garden details).
- Continue deadheading, watering and weeding.

September

- Plant perennials and spring wildflowers.
- Deadhead roses during their second flush of bloom.
- Plant cool-season annuals. Frost tolerant flowering selections include calendulas, diascias, linaria, nemesias, pansies, petunias, snapdragons, stocks, sweet alyssum and violas.
- Cut down and remove peony foliage as it begins to discolor.
- Plant peonies and Oriental poppies.

October

- The first frost usually occurs by the end of the month, so be prepared to protect tender plants for continued flower display during Indian summer.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs.
- Bring tropical plants indoors; bananas, elephant ears and mandevillas can be cut back and overwintered in a basement or garage.

November

- Last chance to plant hardy, spring-flowering bulbs. Don't forget to fertilize them with 5-10-5 after covering with soil.
- Transplant now-dormant woody trees and shrubs.
- Bring in tender bulbs like acidanthera, gladiolus and cannas. Hang bulbs in mesh bags; store cannas in peat moss.
- Be prepared for a sudden arrival of winter. Have compost on hand for covering roses or other tender plants just in case of early freeze up.
- One of the most important tasks this season is to make sure trees and shrubs are well watered before winter freeze. This is especially important for evergreens. During dry, snowless winters you may water on mild winter days above 55 degrees (F).
- Winter wrap new plants to prevent winter injury caused by sunscald, particularly newly planted tender plants and those with thin bark.
- Mulch perennials with organic matter (ground bark or leaves are best), those that have rock garden affinities can be mulched with gravel. Mulch tender perennials heavily; place evergreen branches over the mulch for additional protection.
- Mound at least 10 inches of soil or compost around the base of tender roses after the ground freezes.
- Do not prune back butterfly bushes and other tender shrubs such as chastetree, beautyberry, crape myrtle and blue mist spireas until new growth begins in spring. After a mild winter, there may be no dieback at all.
- Do not prune ornamental grasses until mid-spring. The foliage and seed heads not only provide winter interest, but also help protect the plant through winter freezes and thaws.

December

- Monitor deer and rabbit damage to woody ornamentals.
- Give gardening tools a good cleaning and sharpening.
- Review your garden diary and photographs to plan for next spring.