



THE WINTER GARDEN

Garden Topics and Tasks
Presented by Shari Petrucci

I remember when I first started gardening. It was the year my husband and I bought our very own home. We finally had a place of our own where our 4 teenage kids could spread out, and I could have a garden like my mother's. I was filled with such enthusiasm! I was going to grow everything!. It can't be that hard! That was in February... By July I almost threw in the towel! I had the most beautiful garden of weeds in the neighborhood!

One day at work a kindly patron who came in often asked me if I liked gardening. As the weeks and months went by, we shared our love of gardening through mini conversations at the check out counter. He asked me if I would be interested in becoming a Master Gardener. I laughed! But, he planted a seed in my brain. That seed grew and grew until I applied and was accepted into the Master Gardening Program in Western Massachusetts.

Needless to say, I am still gardening. I continue to read, observe, and try new techniques. I combined that knowledge and experience with my art education degree and began hosting a plethora of programs for the private sector and for the Western Massachusetts Master Gardeners Association (WMMGA) annual garden symposia in Holyoke, Amherst, and the Berkshires. I hosted short segments of gardening education on Channel 22 News' Mass Appeal. As the years have passed and grandchildren now take up a lot of my spare time I've reduced the amount of my volunteering efforts and the size of my gardens.

This is where the first rule of thumb comes in when it comes to gardening. There is no such thing as a perfect gardener. No matter how much you learn or experience you have... life can and will get in the way, weather will always throw curve balls, garden pests and disease never ever just disappear. My advice to you is to learn, plan, and start out small. Create to enjoy a gardening life that actually fits into your life!

Welcome to January

Whether you are an **in-the-ground gardener** or **pots-on-the-deck gardener**, there is always plenty to do and think about to prepare you for your next gardening endeavor. Let's begin with January. We will cover 4 topics with a series of links posted throughout to carry you through some of the more specific attributes of the topics.



Topics

1. Clean Garden Tools
2. Preview Seed Catalogs
3. Your Carbon Footprint
4. Your Garden Journal
5. Free Printables
6. Books To Read



1. Clean Garden Tools

Now is the time to clean, repair, and store your garden tools away for the winter. If you can't repair something that is broken or just worn out, make a note to replace it before spring comes. Usually in the winter there are a lot of discounts for leftover gardening supplies so don't wait until spring.

I've made mistakes by cleaning them in the fall and low and behold I needed them again for one reason or another. So, now I clean them in January. Lately our winters have been very mild so I pick a fairly warmer day in the month. Begin by using a 5 gallon contractor's bucket filled with water, a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of bleach, and a squirt of dish soap. Put all the small hand held tools and soak them in the bucket together. I use a long handled scrub brush to clean off any dirt or debris and then set aside on a sidewalk or driveway. When working with bleach, be careful not to discolor the wood on your deck or kill the grass. Then one by one I dip and brush the shovels, rakes, hoes, etc. After, I like to hose them down and let them drip dry a bit before I wipe them down using an old bath towel cut into quarters. (This way I don't feel so bad about throwing the rags away.) Properly dispose of the remaining cleaning liquid into a utility sink or toilet as not to pollute the watershed. After drying the tools, store them away in a protected area such as a shed or garage, or roll them together into a tarp and tie it up for outdoor storage.



2. Preview Seed Catalogs

Whether you prefer to order paper catalogs or view them on-line, now is the time to start listing what it is you want to grow in your summer garden. First things first, learn how to read a catalog. Review the key codes for the many attributes listed by each seed variety. Many seeds in catalogs have codes as to quantity per packet, yield, days to maturity, etc.

(I once checked the wrong box on an order and received 5000 purple coneflower seeds!
I made many seed treats for the birds that year!)

Make sure you read the paragraph about the specific plant and any instructions that are included. Order your favorites or try something new! Many varieties of seeds are also available at local CSA garden centers if you don't want to buy on-line. Click on the link below to find a center near you. Don't wait too long to order, the most popular tried-and-true seeds and fanciful new varieties sell out fast!

- Only grow what you can manage in the garden or pots.
- Only grow what you will eat! Make note of the yield for 1 plant.
- Know the difference between annuals and perennials when ordering. Annuals grow for only 1 season, while perennials come back year after year.
- Know the seeds hardiness zone. Here in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts the USDA hardiness zone is 6A. When buying perennial seeds, they should be cold hardy for at least zone 5 to survive the winters



• [Massachusetts CSA Farms](#)

Listed below is a selection of seed and gardening catalogs. Some have been around for decades, while others are fairly new. All of the catalog's offer organic seeds. Some have live plants you can order on-line if you prefer not to start your own seeds. There are many ways to garden to fit anyone's personal preference. If I buy live plants, I go to my local CSA garden center or farm to help keep my carbon footprint as low as possible.

Click the link to learn more about your carbon footprint.... [What is a Carbon Footprint?](#)

Suggested Seed Catalogs

[Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds](#)

[Seeds From Italy](#)

[Victory Seeds](#)

[Kitazawa Seed Company](#)

[High Mowing Organic Seeds](#)

[Park Seed](#)

[Seed Savers Exchange](#)

[Hudson Valley Seed Company](#)

[Johnny's Select Seeds](#)

[Burpee](#)

[Gurney's](#)

[Annie's Heirloom Seeds](#)

3. Your Garden Journal

To help you organize and plan your garden journey, it is always useful to use a garden journal. You can make your own or buy one that is already laid out for you. I like to make my own using a 3 ring binder because there are always parts of the premade journals that I wouldn't use or have too many illustrations taking up valuable writing space. I can add lined, graph, or blank paper and as much as I want to accommodate my needs. I also use labeled section dividers to find things easier. Depending on the size of the binder, I can fit 3 or more years of journaling in it. This makes it easy to flip back to garden notes from years prior.

The garden journal also helps me not to feel overwhelmed by just thinking about everything I have to do. Trust me when I say it will all jumble into your brain. You can even accompany it with a plain old calendar and use the days of the month for task planning and weather notes such as temperature, rain, germination dates, etc. I like to keep track of my seeds sprout dates so I can determine about when I can expect the vegetable to ripen for harvest. Along the way I make notes if pests or disease pop up that may change the outcome of a plant.

In your journal make sections for plant lists, garden plot or pot design, weather, notes, etc. Leave spaces for pictures of your garden!

Below is a link to a website that offers free downloadable pages you can print and use for a journal. There are many others to choose from on the web.

[Garden Journal Printables](#)



4. Books, books, and more books

Whether you are a novice or seasoned gardener, try reserving the suggested books from our library to learn more about gardening. We will talk more about planting combinations in February's issue.

You may also call us at 413-789-1550 to reserve the book for you. Click on the titles below to be directed to CWMARS and reserve the book or e-book yourself!

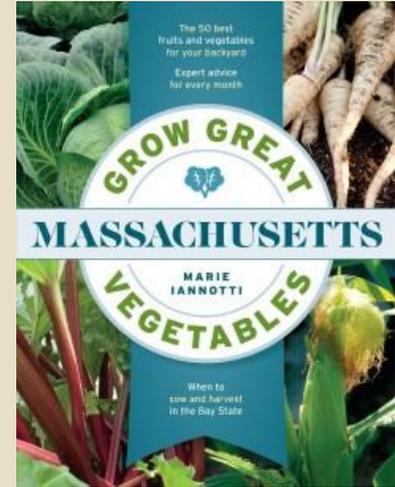
[Carrots love tomatoes : secrets of companion planting for successful gardening](#)

[Grow great vegetables in Massachusetts](#)

[Rodale's basic organic gardening](#)

[Rodale's 21st-century herbal : a practical guide for healthy living using nature's most powerful plants](#)

[Roots, shoots, buckets & boots : gardening together with children](#)



Grow Great Vegetables in Massachusetts

Appropriate for all gardening levels, the regional guide provides detailed instructions for managing a vegetable garden during every month of the year, beginning with January, explaining how to deal with pests common to Massachusetts, when to sow seeds and plant crops, and different methods for watering and fertilizing.