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There's an old saying: "If you've worn shorts and a parka in the same day, you live in New England!" The last six weeks have certainly driven that point home as gardeners have struggled through warmth, humidity, early cold and pelting downpours after a summer of drought, sudden temperature dips and peaks and gardens which are suddenly trying to re-bloom and refusing to follow their usual fall patterns. It's frustrating and it may be the new norm for the foreseeable future but New England gardeners long ago learned how to say goodbye to disappointments. In our heart of hearts we believe that next year will be better! We'll learn to adapt our gardening practices to the new norm and show Mother Nature that we can handle whatever she throws at us! After all, before you know it we'll be at the shortest day of the year and Spring will be a possibility after all!

As the gardening days begin to wind down, there is something very comforting about repeating the annual ritual of putting the garden to bed. It takes place over many weeks without the urgency and pace of spring gardening and allows us the time to savor these last golden days and to take our time over the chores.

Now, dividing and general maintenance in the garden becomes a pleasure. Our ground stays warm until almost Thanksgiving and the temperature cool-down is gradual. Sunny days and cooler nights keep the dew on the grass well into the morning and make gardening a pleasure. You can plant the last of the bulbs, do a little trimming around the edges, take the time to edge the beds. Indian Summer traditionally only occurs when warm days come after a killing frost ... and that occurs anywhere from mid-October to mid-November. It's Mother Nature's last gift to us before we bed down for the winter.

Leaving your garden neat and tidy will pay huge dividends in the spring and give you a jump start on the next season. Many perennials really go dormant on their own schedule and your main role is to tidy up, cutting things back in late October and November. Do not cut back plants too early as it could produce a sudden spurt of new growth. Wait until the plant's leaves are yellow or brown and, as long as no disease is present, remove everything to the compost pile, layering in some fallen leaves.

It's also a good time to reflect on the garden year now ending. What went well, what didn't? What new plants would you like to try? What plants no longer fit in? Are some of your flowering bushes over-grown? Does your basic garden plan still work for your current life? Perhaps you like the way the garden looks now ... plant more of it and have double the pleasure this time next year! Nature never sits still and our gardens change too. Fall is the perfect time to adapt the garden to a new design that better suits the way you choose to garden now.

New Directions

We're taking the time to do a little experimenting too. Our goal is to make the Newsletter easier for you to work with and to enjoy! To do that, we will use the Newsletter for gardening help and general information and use email and the web site to give you quick updates on sales, workshops and other on-going events (including our popular videos) ... please get in the habit of checking both on a regular basis. We expect to add new material to the web site on an ongoing basis ... our Information Handouts currently include sheets on Plants, Seasonal, How To's and Garden Challenges. By all means let us know, by email, what you'd like to see covered. We get some terrific ideas from customers! Please let us know what you find most useful as we all adapt to an ever-changing gardening world.

Gift cards and Garden Gifts

Are you looking for that special birthday or anniversary present? Do you need to say "thank you for a wonderful visit" or let someone know just how much you appreciate what they've done? Acer Gardens Gift Cards are the ideal answer and are available either online or at the Nursery. A Gift Card can bring many hours of enjoyment and make your life easier at the same time!

Christmas isn't that far away! What gardener wouldn't like to find a new pair of garden gloves tucked into their stocking? Or replacement tools for all the trowels/pruners we lost/mis-placed this summer and specialty houseplant aids? Bulbs for forcing are always the gift that keeps on giving! Let us help you make your holidays merry and bright!

Plan for the Coming Holidays

Christmas Trees

Fresh-cut only a few days before Thanksgiving, Douglas and Fraser Fir Christmas trees will be available at the nursery. They can be pre-ordered; local delivery is available, for a fee. This year, it's definitely a good idea to place your order early.

Wreaths, containers, bows, arrangements, mixed greens and assorted decorations (all weather-proof) will be available at the nursery starting the week before Thanksgiving. Pre-potted paperwhites in pebbles will be available ... just take them home and water them to start them growing! We also have many indoor house plants available to keep your gardening spirits up all through winter! With a little care, you can keep those flowers blooming all through the dark and dreary winter days!

Poinsettia

Some poinsettias can remain in bloom for 2-6 months! They prefer a day temperature of 67 degrees, hate drafts and like a humid environment and the bright, indirect light of an east window. Our poinsettias will be ready for sale just before Thanksgiving.

Amaryllis

Acer has a remarkable selection of amaryllis bulbs available this year, including a wide selection of unusual shapes and color combinations in # 1 size for you to plant in your own containers. Allow 8-12 weeks from potting to bloom and start them at 10 day intervals so that you will have flowers all winter long. Plant one bulb, firmly, to a pot and place in indirect sunlight at room temperature. (Be sure to place a saucer under the pot.) Water after potting and then only when the soil is dry to the touch. Do not mist.

As the flowers fade, cut off the entire stalk. You may get lucky and get another bloom! Amaryllis should spend the summer outdoors in the sun. Around Labor Day, stop any watering, cut off the leaves and store the bulbs in their pots in the cellar, away from any sun. Do not water them until you are ready to start the forcing cycle again.

Christmas Cactus

This cactus doesn't come from the desert but from the rainforests of southern Brazil ... it therefore prefers more humid conditions. Available in 8 different shades, including rosy red and pink, it is fairly easy to grow as long as you satisfy its basic needs. Place it in bright, indirect light and water when the top soil feels dry. The plants prefer to be in the dark at night in the weeks before they flower but they don't like to get too chilly (between 60 and 70 degrees is about right). Fertilize lightly every 2-3 weeks.

Amending Your Garden Soil

Fall is the ideal time to amend your garden soil. The first step is to have your soil tested. Go to www.soiltest.uconn.edu for complete instructions on the process. You will receive a report which will include both analysis and recommendations for improving your particular soil. Some gardeners test soil from different parts of the garden and act accordingly.

Soil is usually evaluated on two components: fertility and texture. Fertility delivers essential nutrients to plants; texture refers to the size and composition of the soil particles. The nutrients plants need the most are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

Nitrogen produces healthy leaf and stem growth but it does not stay in the soil very long and can be washed out by rains. Too much nitrogen in the soil will cause excessive foliage growth. Phosphorus is needed for root growth. Adding bone meal when planting bulbs in the fall helps in producing flowers next season. Potassium contributes to overall good plant health and is necessary for plants to flower and fruit. It is water soluble and needs to be replenished from time to time.

The ideal garden soil texture is a sandy loam which allows for air and water movement. Adding organic matter to soil encourages beneficial microbial activity and provides a nutritional benefit. An excellent source of beneficial organic matter is composted peat moss manure. How well your soil absorbs the organic matter will determine what supplemental feeding will be necessary to keep your plants happy.

Put Your Leaves to Work for You!

Nature builds soil steadily by using fallen leaves ... and why shouldn't that work for you? The colors of the leaves look wonderful but those same leaves can be a great help to your gardening. And all that organic matter is free!

The large amount of organic material offered by leaves can be used to improve soil structure:

- Leaves feed earthworms and beneficial microbes

- They increase the moisture retention of soil

- Shredded, they make an attractive garden mulch while enriching soil at the same time

- Their carbon content balances the nitrogen in your compost pile

- They insulate tender plants and self-sown seedlings from the cold

1. Add to your compost pile by layering rich-brown leaves with green material (grass clippings and dead plant matter) and let it sit all winter.
2. Chopped leaves make a protective mulch for vegetable gardens and will help retain soil moisture. They are particularly helpful for berries and ornamental shrubs.
3. While the leaves are falling, mow them into the lawn with the blade set at 3”.
4. Fallen leaves will provide some winter cover to wildlife, especially pollinators such as bees, moths, butterflies, snails and spiders.

Help Evergreens Face the Cold

Evergreens need to be well-watered before the start of winter but they should not be fertilized. Do not cut back your evergreens in the fall. If an evergreen has really exceeded its limits, take a few cuttings for Christmas decorations or containers. A late November application of an anti-transparent (such as Wilt-Stop) will help to protect your evergreens from winter desiccation and can also be sprayed on hydrangeas and Japanese maples. For best results, re-apply after a warm winter period in mid-February.

And by the way, Fall is the perfect evergreen planting time! If they are visible from the house, evergreens can add a strong vertical accent and focal point to the landscape and give you “green” to look at through the dreary days of winter. Firs, pines, hemlocks and cypress offer a wide range of color shades, shapes and sizes to choose from. They also provide a level of privacy which deciduous trees and bushes cannot offer. Most of all, they are nice to look at!

Getting The Garden Ready for Winter

Last spring, New England gardeners discovered, once again, what a long, cold, wet winter can do to trees, shrubs and perennials! Extreme cold isn’t always the biggest problem. Early cold spells can damage plants that haven’t gone through the normal “hardening off” period. Dry winds can “burn” conifer needles and broadleaf evergreen foliage. Unexpected midwinter thaws can fool plants into breaking dormancy too early, leaving them vulnerable to the next cold snap. Freeze/thaw cycles can heave plants out of the ground. Deer, chipmunk, rabbits and other critters will gnaw bark during the winter and leave evergreens and shrubs damaged. Snow is actually a friend! A constant layer of snow cover provides moisture and helps insulate soil and roots against fluctuating temperatures. Gardeners, as well as skiers, hope for snow!

Healthy plants are more likely to survive winter unscathed. Start your winter protection routine in autumn. (Don’t prune after midsummer. Pruning can stimulate new, tender growth and can delay dormancy. Stop fertilizing plants 6 weeks before the first fall frost to help plants harden off.) Water thoroughly until the ground freezes.

Perennials

Most plants need to be cut back after heavy, killing frosts to prevent disease and pest problems in the spring but doing this too early can deprive roots of gaining energy from the fading leaves. Any diseased or bug-infested leaves should be bagged and put in the garbage, not the compost pile. Compost is a soil conditioner, not a fertilizer, so apply it now to get a jump on spring. Do a final weeding. Edge your beds and start the next gardening year looking neat and tidy. A light winter mulch will help keep the soil temperature even. Waiting until the ground is frozen to apply mulch will discourage rodents from making nests and building condos.

Shade Plants

Ferns. If your ferns are growing in a natural, woodland setting, you can leave the dying fronds in place. They will decompose naturally and the new fronds will be able to easily push up through the spent foliage in the spring. The spent fronds will protect the fern's crown throughout the winter and you can tidy up the plant in the spring. Some gardeners wait to tidy up ferns in the spring until the deer have lost interest in new fronds.

Hosta. Hostas are very low on the fall maintenance scale! After a hard frost, cut the entire plant back to the ground. (Removing the dead leaves will discourage slugs.) If slugs were a problem this past summer, treat the soil now. Don't compost the dead leaves as you could spread disease. Light mulch (only an inch or two) will discourage pests and protect the root system. Hostas can be divided in the fall before the first frost. Each new plant should be watered well but not fertilized until early spring.

The Fall "Avoid Future Trouble" List

Leave grass clippings on the lawn to decompose. Re-seed areas as needed. Around the second or third week in November apply fertilizer.

Prune any deadwood from trees and shrubs to control storm damage.

Tie back long climbing rose canes to prevent wind whip. Hill up soil and mulch around the base of hybrid teas and climbers before the ground freezes.

Edge the perennial beds so that the garden has a neat appearance going into the winter.

Leave ornamental grasses in place ... they will act as a bird refuge in the winter.

Start to apply deer repellents now. Creatures of habit, deer quickly get used to certain scents and are lazy about changing established routes so it's a good idea to change repellents often.

Remember to store Wilt-Stop, insecticides, fungicides and other "gooey" products in the laundry room or a frost-free cellar. Granular fertilizer and seeds can be safely stored in the garage.

Winter Containers

Containers can also make the final switch to winter very easily. Think about adding small evergreens which can be transplanted into the garden in the spring. Back them with colored stems for a little punch. Use branches with berries and add cut evergreens and cones as the holidays approach. Add a few boxwood cuttings to spike the foliage. Place the winter containers where they can be seen from the house as a way to connect the outside landscape to the inside. Add little white outdoor lights as the holidays draw near.

Storing Tender Bulbs and Tubers

After a killing frost, cut off the leaves and dig up dahlias, gladioli, cannas, caladiums, colocasia (Elephant Ears) and acidanthera. Do not wait for these tubers/bulbs to freeze before you dig them up. Clean off the soil (do not wash) and store the roots on their side in vermiculite or the cedar shavings used at the bottom of gerbil cages. They do well stored in boxes in the basement, protected from temperature extremes and dampness. Label by type and color. If mice routinely get into your cellar, ask your supermarket produce manager for an empty fine-meshed red onion bag. Line the bag with several layers of newspaper, add the

cedar chips and layer the bulbs/tubers in. Pull the bag closed, label by type and color, and hang high on a hook in the cellar.

Houseplants and Light

Your houseplants are all safely back in the house after their summer outdoors. Grouping plants together in the house is an easy way to generate humidity (especially if all the plants are on a water-filled humidity tray) and to showcase diverse foliage and plant forms. Fertilize the houseplants lightly every 2 weeks all winter long.

Rex begonia (fabulous foliage), ferns (try Japanese painted fern or Boston fern), coleus, English ivy, pilea and pepperomia are all good choices for indoor color all winter long. Most houseplants don't like the direct sun of a windowsill although cyclamen, gardenia, and geraniums actually prefer a south facing window. East and west facing windows are fine for most plants but you need to understand the growth habits of your plants. Leaves that are pale green or stems that are weak or too long indicate that your plants need more light. Placing your plant properly is key to growing healthy house plants and light levels are important.

Standard light definitions:

Bright light: a sunny southern or western facing window with bright, direct light all day.

Indirect light: an eastern facing window or the interior of a room that faces south or west.

Low light: rooms with north facing windows provide little direct light.

Grow lights are often helpful and some plants thrive when placed under ordinary house lamps even if most of that light comes in the evening! Watching your house plant's performance and monitoring its growth will tell you what it needs. As the days begin to lengthen, those needs may begin to change.

Enjoying Succulents

Most gardeners put their house succulents outside for the summer but once they come back inside the rules change and the goal is to keep them alive! Outside, succulents grow in bright light, ranging from full sun to open shade. Inside, place them near a south-facing window. An east window would be the next choice. They need to be watered less frequently inside so don't overwater. They need really good draining soil ... add a bit of sand to the potting mixture. Terracotta pots are a better choice than plastic. Water only when the soil is dry (once a week or every two weeks) and don't provide too much humidity. Most succulents don't need fertilizer. Rotate your plants by a quarter turn every few days to give even sunlight exposure.

Often-Asked Questions

I'm going to spend part of this winter designing a new part of my garden. I can't fence ... how can I make it safer from deer damage?

There are some design choices that will give deer a reason to skip turning your garden into a deer buffet but the reality is that a hungry deer will try anything, at least once. The trick is to make that buffet as unpleasant a meal as possible so they won't return! Rely on plants deer really don't like: hellebores, daffodils, monkshood, astilbe, monarda, lavender, kniphofia, salvia, anemone, achillea and poppy. Use ferns, grasses and sedges. Deer have a highly developed sense of smell and tend to avoid strong smelling foliage plants like mints. Planting in drifts appears to discourage them ... they get tired! If you use repellent sprays, switch the brand from time to time as deer are lazy and get used to new things quickly.

What makes a hardy chrysanthemum different from the standard “dig in and enjoy” florist mum?

The true perennial mum, *Dendranthemum*, is a beautiful, dependable flower requiring almost no maintenance during the growing season. They burst into bloom in October, showcasing daisy-like flowers in many shades, especially pink and rose, reaching 2-3'. Give them full sun, rich, well-drained soil, and lots of room. Deadhead to extend bloom time. Division every 2-3 years will control their tendency to spread. These lovely flowers combine well with grasses, asters and sedums.

Should I hill up my climbing roses for the winter?

Most climbers are happy to be “hilled”, especially if they are exposed to the prevailing winter winds. Trim off any dead wood at the ends of the canes and tie up the canes to prevent “wind whip”. Hill up the roses to give them extra protection and don't be in too big a hurry to uncover them ... spring doesn't come all that early any more!

I never know if I should mulch for the winter or not. I don't want to give protection to rodents and gnawers but the ground looks so bare!

In areas without reliable snow cover, such as south-eastern Connecticut, mulch can be very useful but it's a good idea to wait until the ground is frozen hard before applying it. You can use straw, or evergreen boughs, but avoid using leaves or grass clippings. The mulch should be removed after the first serious thaw (don't fall for that fake February thaw), whenever it comes.

Should I rake the leaves off the ground around rhododendrons and azaleas?

Many gardeners prefer not to rake leaves out of shade gardens. Fallen leaves act as a natural mulch for broad leaf evergreens such as rhododendrons, azaleas and mountain laurel and help prevent moisture loss during a dry winter. As the leaves break down they will enrich the soil and form a good base for spring mulch.

I love the look of little bulbs but I never know how close to each other I can plant them. Is there a rule-of-thumb?

Here's an easy table to refer to ... with the number of bulbs you can plant per square foot.

Chionodoxa	8 – 10	Greek windflower	10-15
Crocus	10-15	Hyacinth	4-6
Grape hyacinth	10-15	Siberian squill	9-12
Daffodils	4-5	Tulips	4-5

How do we Plant Garlic?

Plant both hardneck and softneck garlic after a hard frost. Pick a new area in the vegetable garden with fertile, well-drained soil. Take the garlic cloves apart and plant 4-6" apart 1 ½-2" deep. Mulch lightly with straw. The garlic will start to grow now. In the spring, you will see more growth and the bud will form scapes. Cut that stalk off ... it's delicious sautéed. After the foliage yellows and browns in midsummer you can start to harvest and dry the garlic. Store the garlic in bunches in a cool location. The nursery has several different kinds of garlic bulbs available ... all will do well in this climate.

What can I do in the garden to get a head start on Spring? It all seems so overwhelming! Is there such a thing as a Bare Bones List?

Yes, there is a Bare Bones List: Cut down and remove the dead stuff, rake off the leaves, add compost and edge the beds. Just add in the extras that apply to your garden!

The ground is so much easier to work in the fall and everything will look sharp going through the winter if you edge the beds. Then, in the Spring, you'll have a head start and one thing will be crossed off your list!

The Vegetable Garden

Clean out the vegetable garden. Remove all old plants and fruits (roots, leaves and stems) but do not put them in the compost bin ... burn or put in garbage bags to help prevent the spread of disease and insects. Double dig the empty bed and add compost to be ready for early spring plantings. Adding shredded leaves sprinkled with some granular organic fertilizer will add nitrogen to the soil. Cover your strawberries lightly with straw not hay (which harbors weeds). Remember to make a chart of the layout of your vegetable bed so that you can rotate the crops next spring. Re-assess your plantings to decide if you grew the right "mix" for your family's eating habits. Don't be discouraged! Last summer was a tough one for many vegetable growers, not just you, and next Spring we will all start fresh... and optimistic!

Think about ways to expand next year's vegetable garden by re-arranging space. More abundant harvests are possible by not planting just in rows. Peas, cucumbers and tomatoes can all be grown on stakes or trellises as long as you allow for the weight of the mature plant. Many new varieties of vegetables have been developed recently to accommodate gardeners who grow vegetables in containers on the patio or deck. Small-sized vegetables currently available include bush cucumbers and patio tomatoes. Adding a raised bed can expand your options. Many new varieties of vegetables have been developed recently to accommodate gardeners who grow vegetables in containers on the patio. Small-sized vegetables currently available include bush cucumbers, patio tomatoes and some summer squashes but new varieties are constantly being introduced.

Holiday Flowers, Wreaths and Containers

Wreaths, containers, bows and mixed greens will be available at the nursery starting mid November. We take individual orders and can help you design a tablescape to fit your holiday décor. If you have favorite holiday table containers bring them to the nursery and let staff help you fill them to make this holiday season really special! Gift certificates are available at the nursery as well as pre-planted paper-whites in containers and many amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted. Need an unusual present? Take a look at our pre-decorated bird-houses ... they make outstanding presents! Indoor containers can be designed and planted to fit with your other decorations. Just come and visit and please give us a few days preparation time.

The Bulbs are Here!

This year, Acer Gardens has many different kinds of bulbs available, with a greatly expanded selection. Tulips are here in many vibrant colors as are the familiar Daffodils and Hyacinths. Bulbs are an easy way to add color and diversity to existing beds and will provide welcome color after a long winter! It's a good idea to plant a few unexpected/unusual bulbs in areas you can see from the house. Try tucking them in under low, spreading evergreens so that they will poke through the branches. Adding small bulbs to your established gardens is a quick way to enhance your spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with "new looks". Daffodils and paper whites for forcing and large-sized amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted, will also be available.

Alliums

The key to growing terrific alliums (and giving flower beds a “WOW” factor) is choosing the right location! Alliums are happiest planted in soil that is well-draining with full sun. After planting, sprinkle on some Bulb Tone and give the bulbs a handful of the mixture in the summer when the blooms fade. Pinch the faded head off before it sets seed but leave the foliage and stem to feed the bulbs. They are slow to multiply but if you find you have a large clump of foliage but no flowers, lift, divide and reset. The nursery has stocked many Allium cultivars, both tall and short, including new red and white varieties as well as the familiar large purple flowers.

Hyacinths

Hyacinths are well-suited to container planting and make superb edging plants. Their strong colors and fragrance make a color splash along well-travelled walkways. Blooming in early to mid spring, Hyacinths are good companions for daffodils and tulips. Plant the bulbs 4- 6” deep in full to partial sun and protect with extra mulch during the winter months.

Some bulbs have proven to be resistant to vole damage. Try growing alliums, muscari, daffodils, scilla, hyacinths and hyacinthoides.

Photograph your garden before you plant your bulbs and mark the photographs so that you know where the new bulbs have been situated. Many gardeners keep a special “bulb” album to help them remember plantings.

Don’t be afraid to mix-and-match your bulbs and to plant in drifts. Careful planning can give you bulb bloom from March to May. Naturalizing gives an informal look and is a particularly useful technique for bulbs that multiply easily. Once flowers fade, the foliage keeps growing so choose a site that doesn’t need early spring mowing. Bulbs want well-drained soil. Avoid planting bulbs in areas that remain wet for a long time as they may rot. Oddly enough, some smaller bulbs simply don’t have a true “pointy side up ” so just lay the bulb on its side when you plant it; it will generally right itself and grow toward the sun.

Before planting, store your bulbs in a cool, dry place with low humidity away from heat and strong sunlight. Wait to plant until the ground has cooled down to around 55 F so that they don’t grow unnecessary top growth and waste their energies. Late October to mid-November is optimum planting time for this area although Lilies should not be planted until well into November. As you plant your bulbs, add Bulb Tone fertilizer before back-filling the dirt. When the bulbs have bloomed in the spring and the foliage has died back, top dress the bulbs again with Bulb Tone.

We plant tulips and daffodils almost every year. Here’s how to keep them really happy:

Daffodils:

Daffodils are a sure sign of spring and incredibly welcoming after a long, gray winter! Deer-resistant and rodent-proof, they earn their keep many times over. Water late-flowering daffodils in spring if the weather turns dry. Deadhead as needed but let the leaves yellow for at least 6 weeks before removing them. They need to store energy for next year’s bloom. If you notice sparse bloom it may be time to lift the clump and divide. Once the Daffodils are finished for the season, dig in some bone-meal to ensure good growth for next spring. When cutting Daffodils for the house, don’t mix them with other flowers ... their stems produce a fluid which makes other flowers wilt almost immediately!

Tulips:

Generally the last of the spring bulbs to bloom, Tulips give bold masses of color. They look best when planted in large numbers so the more you plant, the better the show will be! Position them close to the house to give them protection from late storms and cold snaps. Tulips need several hours of direct sunlight in order to put on their best blooms. (They will, however, bloom under deciduous trees which don't have their leaf canopies yet.) Warm afternoon sun and exposure to wind can cut down the length of bloom time so try to avoid those conditions. Since they don't all bloom at the same time, careful selection can give you extended bloom time.

When planting, fertilize. In the spring, as the leaves emerge, fertilize again and water well. Deadhead the Tulips but let the leaves yellow at least 6 weeks before removing. In this climate, tulips generally last about 3 years before needing replacing.

Forcing Bulbs

Forcing and growing bulbs indoors gives us a way to have flowers blooming even with snow on the ground and makes a great family winter project. "Forcing" is simply a way of making a bulb produce leaves and flowers ahead of its natural outdoor schedule. You speed up the process by manipulating time and temperature.

Almost any container can be used for forcing bulbs but you will need a run-off saucer under the container if it has drainage holes. Fill the container 2/3 full of soil and moisten. Place the bulbs (close together but not touching) and gently press down. Add soil to the top of the container, water, and put in a cool, dark place like a refrigerator or unheated garage/cellar. Chilling for at least 6-8 weeks will imitate dormancy. Flowering will take about 12 weeks for snowdrops, crocus and daffodils and about 16 weeks for tulips. When you see shoots about 3" above the soil line, bring the bulbs into a cool location. When the foliage and buds are well developed, move the pots to a bright, sunny window.

Forcing paper-whites is particularly easy because the bulbs do not require a chilling period and need only 5-6 weeks from planting to bloom. You'll have Christmas flowers if you start your paper-whites by November 10. Plant at 2-week intervals and enjoy blooms from Christmas to Easter.

Paper-whites grow best using the stones and water method: take a waterproof bowl and fill it 2/3 full of gravel or small, decorative stones, usually white. Insert the base of the bulbs so that they sit firmly and add more stones but do not cover them. Pour in water up to the base of the bulbs, replenishing as needed, and store in a cool, dark place (usually 2-3 weeks) until first growth appears. Some people add 1 Tb. of vodka or plain gin to the paper-white water after the bulbs come out of their storage period. This helps keep the stems short and prevents toppling but will not interfere with bloom. Do not fertilize the bulbs.

Forcing is very hard on most bulbs and they will not bloom again. Tulips and paper-whites should just be thrown out. Amaryllis will re-bloom successfully (see above directions.)

For many of us, the first real sign of Spring is that magic carpet of flowering crocus flung across part of the lawn! You can replicate that look indoors. With a few days notice, the nursery will pot up some crocus for you to force. Choose one of our containers, select your bulbs and get ready for Spring!

Acer Gardens' information sheet on **Forcing Bulbs** is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Last Chores

Clean out the bird feeders and prepare them for the coming season. Store bird seed in metal garbage cans with tight-fitting lids to discourage access by mice.

Empty containers, clean and place in the garage. Some alpine troughs (Hypertufa) can be left out if placed near the house but stone planters are not winter-proof and should be stored in the garage.

Clean out the wheelbarrow and discard any damaged garden gloves/tools. Clean and sharpen garden tools. Leave everything tidy on the garden shelves. Some gardeners claim an open jar (or small Ziploc bag) of dried mint leaves left near the house entrance from the garage helps to discourage mice from entering.

Drain and store hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets.

Winters can be long in New England. Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The annual CT Garden Show will take place from Thursday, February 19 through Sunday, February 22, 2020 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. with a theme of “The Storybook Garden”. There will be over 300 booths, exhibits and landscaped garden demonstrations (which are free with your ticket.) This year, live music is a new feature of the show! Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, ticket availability and seminar listings. What a great way to get ready for spring!

General Reminder

Acer Gardens will close on 12/20 and, weather permitting, will re-open on March 25, 2026. Check the web site for the exact date as we get closer to the end of winter!

Acer Gardens
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