

# Garden Club Horticultural Hints

February 2021

Stay safe, stay warm, think spring!



**Houseplants can dry out at this time of year.** Your houseplants need less water in the winter, and certainly don't require fertilizing. But, if you have plants close to radiators, forced hot air, or other heat sources, check them frequently because those pots will dry out far more quickly than ones setting away from heat outlets. A finger pushed down into the soil is the best determinant of whether the plant's soil is drying out too quickly.



**Help the birds in your garden get through the rest of this winter.** Birds that choose to overwinter in New England do so because they can find sufficient food. Water, though, is harder; and even vernal pools can freeze up in February. You can do your avian friends a good turn by either purchasing and setting up an electrically heated water station, or frequently replenishing the water in your unheated bird bath placed in a sunny location.

*For reasons lost to history, each February 1 we still insist on exalting the groundhog or, as they're known in New England, woodchucks. Maybe Bill Murray is to blame. Woodchucks do extensive damage to landscaping wherever they're able to establish a colony. They may be cute, but they're noxious pests in any garden.*

## Not Wanted



### Groundhog

Alias woodchuck, marmot, whistle-pig, land beaver and wuchuk

**A present from the heart for gardeners.** Instead of flowers on Valentine's Day, how about a gift certificate to your loved one's favorite nursery? Valentine's Day flowers have often been stored to be 'stockpiled' for the February 14<sup>th</sup> rush and are marked up substantially. A gift certificate will be remembered in April and May, long after flowers are faded. If a nursery gift certificate isn't appropriate, how about a membership in a horticultural, environmental, or conservation organization?



**Cut the vines that bind.** One of the advantages of winter is that certain problem areas are more readily apparent. For example, invasive vines stand out in stark relief against the trees those vines are climbing – and strangling. Use your walks around your own property and neighboring areas to spot unwanted species such as Asian bittersweet, wisteria, and English ivy. Cut them close to the ground and leave them in place to die, while periodically checking the site for growth from the vine's roots.



**February is a great month to prune.** Another advantage of winter is the opportunity to see problem areas in your shrubs and fruit trees, and correct them before they become serious ones with expensive solutions.. Without leaves, problems such as water spouts and broken or crossing branches are easy to spot and just as easy to cut out. Making certain you've recently sharpened your pruners, go after those problem areas you can easily reach from the ground. If the problem requires a ladder though, it's time to call in a professional.

**Beware of freeze and thaw.** Unlike other recent winters, there's no snow on the ground this year to provide a protective blanket for perennials and recently-planted shrubs. As temperatures drop into the teens at night but rise into the 30s or higher during the day, the freezing and thawing cycle can push a plant out of the ground. Gently use the heel of your hand to press plants back to be flush to the soil.



*Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for February and throughout the year, please visit [www.BettyOnGardening.com](http://www.BettyOnGardening.com)*