

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

GIFTS of the GARDEN



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Master Gardener

Question: I am so busy with the holidays, I haven't been giving my garden much thought this month. Is there anything I should be doing?

Answer: Most of us don't think about gardens much in late December. The sparkle and demands of the holiday season — baking, gatherings and gifts — keep us stretched to the limits even as the sun climbs out of bed later and later, and retires far too early.

Thankfully, for most gardens (and gardeners), this is a season predominantly of rest. There are a few small tasks that when given attention can provide benefit, but late December is also a time to remember the garden's many gifts.

One task to do now is to double-check that you have protected your hoses, watering wands and sprinklers from frost damage by making sure they are detached, drained and stored.

In our mild climate, this one is easy to overlook. I learned this the hard way last winter!

These tasks can wait until after the holidays:

- **Weeding.** Though most plants have gone dormant, weeds have not. Bittercress and other opportunists thrive in our mild winters. They are easy to pull now while the soil is damp and before they go to seed. The dampness also allows for the safe use of a hand-held garden propane torch, one which I prefer when the issue is more pervasive (a tool you might want to add to your own wish list). Adding a layer of mulch will discourage weed regrowth. You can put winter weeding off, but it always results in more work later.

- **You can clean and sanitize your pruners** to be ready for the upcoming dormant season pruning.

But perhaps, in late December, our most important task is to relish our garden's gifts. Even as they slumber, blanketed in cold rain and layers of fog, our gardens have much to give.

THE GIFT OF ABUNDANCE

The wealth of the season is in food and decoration.

Perhaps you have tucked sprigs of dried or fresh greenery into holiday bouquets,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE BURCHSTEAD

Manzanita, garlic sprouts, daphne and gladiola are all plants to enjoy in one's winter garden.



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Manzanita are characterized by smooth orange or red bark and stiff, twisting branches. They bloom in the winter to early spring and carry berries in spring and summer.

garlands or wreaths. Or perhaps your table features dishes with homegrown garlic, herbs, winter squash or preserves.

Botanist Robin Walls Kimmerer, author of "Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants,"

writes, "Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift."

recommends adding one or more of these plants to draw them: Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), beautyberry (*Callicarpa bodinieri*) or snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*). Late winter is a great time to tuck these in.

Gardens also create communities of fellow gardeners. Gardeners may be more inside these days, but are still a generous resource of shared knowledge (and sometimes starts and seeds.)

Imagine my joy when some seeds arrived at my house recently, tucked into a Christmas card by one of my gardening friends.

Gardening communities also offer support and help. Come visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic, which is staffed through the winter, 1-3 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays.

You can also call or email the clinic with questions, large or small.

THE GIFT OF BEAUTY

Seasonal treats. Shed of their leaves, the structure of tree and shrub limbs and the colors and textures of bark are in full reveal for us to enjoy. Red-twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) and Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) are winter stunners.

In my garden, evergreen manzanita (*Arctostaphylos manzanita*), now exposed by the dieback of border perennials, is lovely too.

What might be blooming or preparing to bloom soon in your garden? It won't be long to wait for silk tassel (*Garrya elliptica*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) and Christmas rose hellebore (*Helleborus niger*) to put on their show.

Winter's palette may be more whisper than shout, but is lovely just the same.

THE GIFT OF STILLNESS

When our life gets busiest, and the world seems at its craziest, sometimes a brief walk around a quiet winter garden is the best balm. You never know what you might discover. Quiet moments of unexpected beauty can be the best gift of all.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service. serve the people of Douglas County.

THE GIFT OF HOPE

Signs that warmth and light will return. The waiting seeds on your counter, the swelling buds on trees and shrubs and the emerging tips of garlic and spring bulbs remind us darkness will not last.

And we still have months to plan and dream for next season's plantings.

THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY

Winter can feel lonely and isolating for some. Gardens can provide connection to the world around us.

Gardens draw in communities of nature. Overwintering birds abound these days seeking the seeds and berries of garden plants. Don't forget to glance out the window, even if only briefly, as you finish your morning coffee.

If you aren't seeing birds, OSU Extension's Kym Pokorny