



PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVE RENQUIST

When the weather outside is frightful, fantasy gardening can be delightful.

Winter weather forces gardeners to think outside the box

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Question: No matter which window I look out of this time of year, all I see are the 50 shades of gray of an Oregon winter. My heart longs for the days of spring and summer when I can be out working in my garden, enjoying the creativity, fresh air and sun. What do you do as a Master Gardener to avoid the winter doldrums?

ANSWER: One of the things that has occurred to me while perusing the periodicals in my local magazine store is that sports fans have developed a following around fantasy sports. You can buy computer software and download apps to get you started in building your own sports team.

Sporting experts do a lot of research and publish their findings in monthly magazines designed to help the sports disciples build the perfect football, baseball or quidditch team to be used in a fantasy competition against friends or strangers.

Why aren't we doing the same thing with our gardens? The "player" research has been done and has been published on an annual basis for years. Case in point: this is the time of year when I start to check my mailbox on a daily basis in hopes that

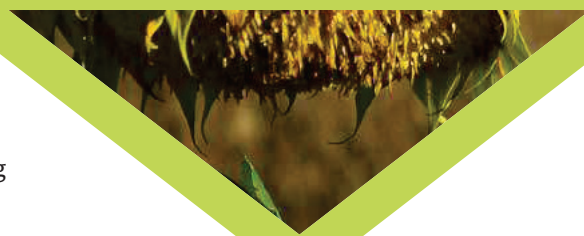
my mail person has delivered the latest seed catalogue.

We can read seed catalogs as a personal "fantasy garden guide." These are publications put together by experts designed to help you and me pick the perfect combination for our gardens. And not only do they have enticing pictures, they also have detailed instructions on how to plant and nurture your garden team.

Embrace our short days and use our long nights to lay out your playing field. In your fantasy garden, experiment with a petunia here, or a clematis there. Use your pastel pencils to color in various blocks of color to



FANTASY GARDENING



Your fantasy garden doesn't have to be perfect on paper. Think of it more like a work by an impressionist rather than a Norman Rockwell rendition.

see how you react to the arraignments.

Hint: limit your colors to those listed in the catalog; even fantasy needs to have some operational parameters. Paper is cheap (but use both sides, and then recycle when finished, so as to be ecologically correct): create a lot of fantasies until you find the one that is most perfect for you and your garden.

Your fantasy garden doesn't have to be perfect on paper. Think of it more like a work by an impressionist rather than a Norman Rockwell rendition. Look more at the general shapes, sizes and colors than at detailed lines.

With a little thought, your creative juices will start to flow and, by the time our days are longer, and our soil is warmer, you will be able to transform your fantasy into a garden reality.

On a more pragmatic side, as you look out your window, you will see life forms other than the flora ones you are dreaming about. This time of year, our feathered friends can add color and a lot of entertaining activity to our gardens.

Unfortunately for them, and fortunately for us this time of year, the ready sources of bird food starts to wither away. Put out a

bird feeder, or a collection of them, and enjoy the birds' entertaining antics from the comfort of your easy chair.

For more fun and fantasy, try to design a squirrel proof feeder, and then see how long it takes the squirrel to out think you. A good, if not realistic goal, is a two to one ratio of your time to the squirrels. In other words, try to not spend more than twice the time in design than the squirrel spends in getting around it.

A little outdoor work now will save you a lot of heart-break later on in the year.

Your fruit trees need to be pruned, and it is time for the dormant sprays to be applied. If you aren't sure how, what or when to spray, contact the Master Gardener Plant Clinic at 541-672-4461 and request a copy of Managing Diseases and Insects in Home Orchards.

An online alternative would be to download a copy from OSU at https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/ec631_0.pdf, but you will miss out on a chance to chat with a friendly Master Gardener and get your additional questions answered.

I have time for one final thought for the wintertime blues. This time of year, we typically get an "early spring" that will be followed up by a resumption of cold, cold winter. While we enjoy the warm sun and being outdoors jacketless, the warm days can fool some of our plants into thinking that spring is upon us, and it is time to start producing.

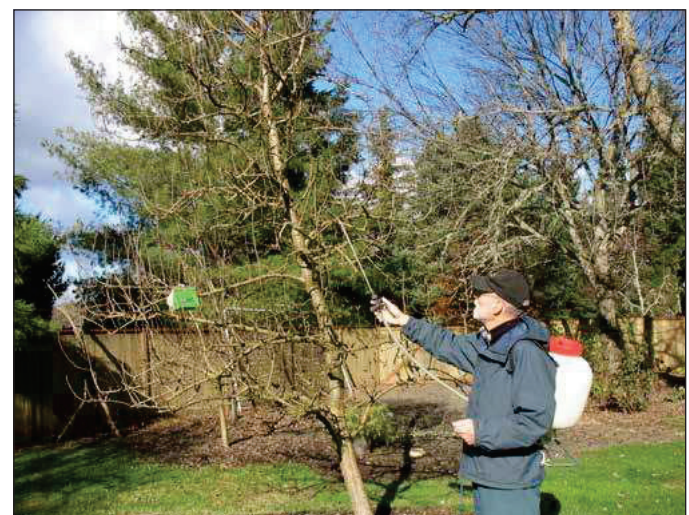
Watch the ground where your bulbs are planted. If you see tender green shoots start to come up, you will probably want to put a layer of mulch over them to protect them from the cold weather to follow.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call or visit the Douglas County Master Gardeners Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-236-3052 or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg (from 1 to 4 p.m.)

ASK A MASTER GARDENER



Use winter as an opportunity to collect seed packets for future gardening endeavors in the upcoming warmer months.



Prevent pest damage to fruit trees by dormant spraying.