



PLATT HILL
NURSERY

Winter Garden Guide

*decor, gift, houseplant, and gardening tips for winter
in chicagoland and northern illinois*

01. November Glow
.....
02. December Delight
.....
03. January Jump-Start
.....
04. February Frolic
.....
05. Weekly Checklist

Introduction

This season, we challenge the traditional definition of “garden” as an outdoor space. Bringing the garden indoors is not only a joy, but has many benefits. Brighten the days of this darker season with new plant life and colorful pots. Blissfully inhale the heady scent of real evergreens and fresh boughs, and be reminded that the season of growth waits around the corner.

We created this guide to help not only our Platt Hill Nursery customers, but all local plant lovers in the Chicagoland area and Northern Illinois. In this guide, you’ll find expertly crafted, yet accessible recommendations for seasonal decor, plantings, and gardening. At the end, you’ll also find a fun and festive checklist for each weekend.

Your Winter Gardening Playbook:

November Glow

- Thanksgiving Decor Ideas
- Holiday Gift Guide

December Delight

- Top Holiday Decor Trends
- Holiday-blooming Plants
- Miniature Gardens

January Jump-Start

- New Year, New (House)Plants
- Managing Common Indoor Plant Pests
- Orchid Care

February Frolic

- Seeds: Sort, Organize, & Store
- Kick-Off to Sowing Season

Your Weekly Checklist





November Glow

Late November brings us crisp mornings, desires to cozy-up to a fireplace, and oftentimes...a longing for getting our hands back into the soil. It's easy to begin longing for gardening opportunities, and we look for ways we can bring living things into our homes. We've got lots of tips to renew your gardening spirit indoors while embracing the holidays with gusto.

In fact, right before Thanksgiving, Platt Hill Nursery hosts its annual Christmas Open House, which offers a great opportunity to shop for winter decor and gifts.

Thanksgiving Decor Ideas

Thanksgiving offers a great opportunity to bring plants into your home. Incorporate plants within your tablescapes, buffet, bar cabinet, or side table. And, don't forget the kitchen! Kitchens are often a gathering point for dinners with family and friends. There are several Thanksgiving decor trends for us to explore this year:

A Fresh Take: Blue, White, and Orange

Thanksgiving falls during a time of the year with the least amount of daylight. As we move closer to the winter solstice on December 21, we'll continue to see the amount of daylight shorten. To combat the moody, deeper tones of nature, try decorating with lighter tones like frosty blue, creamy white, and a bright light orange.

An ever-popular decor concept combines succulents and pumpkins. But, using real pumpkins can require some pre-planning in order to source them for your Thanksgiving event. Shop your garden center early to grab these gourds while they're in stock. Then, preserve them so they last through November.



Photo Credit, bottom right:

Home with Holliday, used with permission

Photo Credit, 2nd row right: Home with Holly, used with permission

Here's how to create the succulent pumpkins you see in these photos:

Preserve (un-carved) pumpkins in a bath solution of 10 parts water to 1 part bleach. Soak them for about 10 minutes, then remove. Dry them thoroughly and re-shine the exterior with a dab of Vaseline and buff using a soft cloth. This helps ready them for the decoration, as well.

Add store-bought preserved forest or Spanish moss with spray adhesive or a glue gun at the top of the pumpkin. Then, gather your succulents. Gently hold the plant from the stem close to soil-level. Remove the soil from the plant with your fingers until just the stem and roots remain. If the stem is long, you may want to trim it down before arranging. Arrange the succulents in layers on top of the moss and secure with strong dressmaker pins, a glue gun, or spray adhesive. Moisten approximately once per week until your event.

When your fall decor is ready to be refreshed for the holidays, don't toss your succulents. Gently pull them away from the pumpkin base and repurpose them in other decor or indoor gardens.



Photo Credit: [1111 Light Lane](#)

Farmhouse Thankful: Buffalo Plaid

The next trend we've spotted is one that is great during either the Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays. Buffalo plaid! No, it's not a plaid trend that has anything to do with buffalo wings or Buffalo, New York. This is a thick and stocky-striped (thus, the tie with buffalo) gingham-like plaid usually seen in black and white, but also many other colorways combined with either black or white.

It's likely that buffalo plaid's popularity over the recent months and years is due to its versatility. Dress it up, dress it down - the choice is yours! The black and white plaid looks especially elegant when combined with fresh greenery like eucalyptus or small preserved boxwood globes. Pinterest offers some great





styling inspiration for entryway tables, kitchen islands, side table, and dining table decor.

Equally as appealing, try pairing orange with the black and white check. Or, try matching multiple colors of buffalo plaids together for a warm but energetic vibe.

Plentiful: Fig & Plum

Another non-traditional take on Thanksgiving decor goes moody and elegant. This trend features lots of purple tones contrasted with bright metallics. Purple tones pair well with dark neutrals like slate blues, greys, and blacks. Add fresh-cut greenery to your centerpiece, combined with ruby and peachy-



Photo Credits | TOP ROW, Far Left: [Have-need-want.com](https://www.have-need-want.com), Middle Left: [Getty Images - Kristen Prah](https://www.gettyimages.com), Middle Right: [Pinterest](https://www.pinterest.com), Far Right: [@nestedsanctuary, Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/nestedsanctuary) BOTTOM ROW, Left: [The Pickled Rose](https://www.thepickledrose.com), Right: [Getty Images - Kristen Prah](https://www.gettyimages.com)

orange blooms for some additional pops of color. This will balance soft (natural) elements and hard (metal and stoneware) textures together. Place trays of fruits like fresh figs, plums, and pomegranates out for guests to enjoy -- either before or after the main feast.

But, a purple-forward Thanksgiving doesn't have to be brooding. Pansies in white and purple make a lovely kitchen island accent. And on the dining table, cut eucalyptus branches are a fresh take in a centerpiece of red and purple berry branches. Copper accents are the star here, too, as they offer a rich warmth and a little shine.



Photo Credits | TOP + BOTTOM, Middle: [ToHaveToHost.com](https://www.tohavetohost.com), BOTTOM, Far Left & Far Right: [Ella Claire & Co.](https://www.ellacloire.com)



Holiday Gift Guide

Houseplants make great gifts for those that are hard to buy for. But, perhaps the greatest shopping thrills are from scoring unique gifts that can't be found in big-box stores.

Platt Hill Nursery has the top gifts for gardeners of all skill levels. And, while you're there, check out their selection of home decor elements. You just might find the perfect gift for a new friend...or something for yourself.

Hydroponic Grow Kits

For nearly care-free plant growing, hydroponic kits are the way to go for any plant enthusiast. The wick ensures your plant gets the right amount of water, so overwatering or underwatering is unlikely. Available for flowers and herbs, it's about as easy as it gets to enjoy a beautiful plant.



Giftable Plants

Live plants make a beautiful addition to a home. A few that work especially well as gifts include:

- Fiddle Leaf Figs
- Hoya
- Norfolk Island Pine
- Orchids
- Philodendron
- Rubber plant
- Succulents

If you can't decide, consider surprising a loved one with Platt Hill Nursery gift cards that they can put toward new landscaping project.



Rae Dunn Gift Sets

One of the hottest trends in the home goods space: Rae Dunn goods are easily identified by the all-caps thin-lined fonts. Often a fun and cheeky phrase or saying, these items are guaranteed to brighten someone's day.



Give The Gift of Warmth & Light

Choose a scent from Urban Farmhouse's *Light Your World* boutique soy candles. Some of our favorites are: Peppermint Swizzle Stick, Warm Vanilla Nutmeg, Carmel Pecan, and Grandma's Cookies.

Or, go big with a Fireside Fire Burner - the perfect table top fireplace for an apartment dweller...or really, *anyone!* With a wide variety of colors and styles to choose from, you're sure to find the perfect fit.





Holiday Gnomes

These aren't your average bum-showing garden gnomes! Meet the holiday gnome, modeled after the mythical creature in Nordic folklore. Legend says these short bearded creatures secretly watch over the home as its guardian. They're available in all shapes and assortments, so you're guaranteed to find one that matches your or your friend's style. Every home can use a guardian, right?

Magnolia Home

For the Chip & Jo fanatic in your life, check out the Magnolia Home collection at Platt Hill Nursery. You'll find a variety of scents that can add that 'special something' to the home. Cozy scents like *Gather*, *Dwell*, *Bloom*, *Love*, and many more are sure to be the perfect holiday gift.



Birdhouses & Bird feeders

Whether an avid "birder" or just discovering the balance that birds can bring to a garden space, these products are a great gift for friends and loved ones this season. Functional or decorative, a birdhouse or feeder offers an attractive and entertaining element to the garden. The right feeder or birdhouse can help attract the birds needed to keep pests away from crops or flowers next year.



Felco Pruners

We agree with Laura from Garden Answer: Felco pruners are top of the line and a staple for serious gardeners. Felco stands behind their pruning shears so much that they offer a lifetime guarantee. The smooth cutting action is unparalleled. All of the parts are interchangeable and replaceable. Try the #2 for larger jobs or #6 for smaller hands. These are a top tool that help achieve a job well done and are well worth their price tag. The holidays are the perfect time to splurge.



Unique Ornaments

It's always a great time to add to the ornament collection!

Enjoy browsing through vintage-style glass, sparkling icicle, stuffed snowmen, woodland creature, or sign ornaments. Ornaments can make a beautiful addition to the top of a wrapped gift.

Your loved one will be reminded of you when they hang your ornament gift on the tree each year.



Platt's Favorite Trowel

This top-notch trowel looks simple but is filled with premium features. Our president and owner, Platt Hill, loves how this trowel has a comfortable grip, and a sharp point to pierce through our clay soils. Also, the stainless steel digging blade features a ruler along one side to measure planting depth. (A useful tool for planting bulbs, extracting taproot weeds, or nearly any garden task.)





December Delight

We love to celebrate the season with beautiful decor. Bringing in fresh elements and beautiful holiday-blooming plants are a true gift during winter months. This month, we'll provide you with an overview of the latest holiday decor trends and how to get the many elements to come together in style.

It's tempting to start decor by visiting stores and picking items up along the way. However, developing a cohesive and elegant holiday atmosphere requires a bit of pre-planning too. Map out where you'll plan to decorate using both old and new decorations.

There are many decor hot-spots to enjoy, both indoors and out. Maybe you'll find some new ideas to try out this year:

- Entryway Planters
- Front Door
- Back Door
- Garage Door
- Mailbox
- Window Wreaths
- Porch Pillars
- Dining Table (Runner/Centerpiece)
- Kitchen Island
- Kitchen Sink (Above/Adjacent)
- Kitchen Cabinet Wreaths
- Coffee Bar
- Bar Cabinet or Cart
- Living Room End Tables/Coffee Table
- Fireplace Mantel

An easy and ever-popular way to add accents in these spaces is by adding some winter-blooming plants or fresh cut greenery.





Greenery may mean outdoor planters, wreaths, swags, garlands, or bundles of evergreen branches. Or, opt to DIY your space with fresh cut greenery bundles for a personal touch.

Here's how to keep fresh cut greenery looking perky all month long: Keep them moist!



If possible, give your cut greens a soak before crafting DIY arrangements or placing them in your decor. Immerse them in cool, clean water for around 24 hours to be sure they've absorbed as much water as possible. When the plant is more swollen with water, the branch and connecting parts will literally hold tighter to the needles and leaves. Even once arranged, misting fresh decor about every two days helps your greens stay greener and last longer. Though, be cautious of other decorative elements that may be impacted by your misting efforts. If possible, remove them before introducing water to the arrangement.



Another trick to keeping your greens greener? Keep them cool! Cooler air will help to lock-in the moisture, since water evaporates faster in warm temperatures. So, avoid placing fresh decor near heavily-used fireplaces or other heat sources. But, if you're looking to be extra sure that as many leaves and needles stay-put, try Wilt-Stop by Bonide. Wilt-Stop will apply a thin clear flexible film over growing evergreens, but it also works well on wreaths and greenery.



Top Holiday Decor Trends 2020

It's important to create an atmosphere at the holidays that brings you joy. Not everyone is able to travel to meet loved ones, so bringing some of that warmth to your home can be especially important. We've compiled the hottest holiday decor trends of the year to help you make the most of the festive vibes:



- Alpine Holiday
- Arctic Glow
- Cardinal Calling
- Farmhouse Festive

PRO TIP: Holiday gnomes continue to be on-trend across all aesthetics. To give your heritage decor an update, try pairing it with a holiday gnome.

Check out the *full-page* photo collage for ideas and inspiration on each trend. Read up on which fresh-cut greenery coordinates best. We've also highlighted an area of the home that best embodies each trend, but don't let that stop you from going all-out!

Alpine Holiday

is all about bringing the ski lodge vacation to you. Surround yourself with this cozy aesthetic by choosing red and white knitted ornaments, cross-stitched pillows, and quilt-reminiscent wall decor.

Fresh Cut Greenery

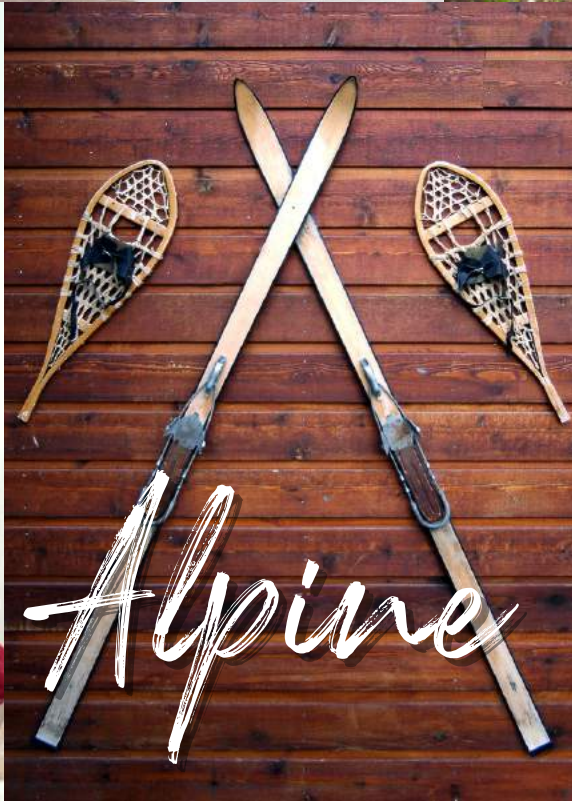
Fresh cut spruce, juniper, and firs are the perfect pick for holiday planters, wreaths, and decorative accents in your home. A fresh wreath on the front door or over a picture window adds an element of warmth to the decor. Incorporate natural elements like picks of winter berries or pine cones.

Decor Feature

The Fireplace | It's hard to ignore the fireplace as the central gathering place after an exhilarating day on the slopes or the trails. So, whether you have a real fireplace, a shelf that you use in place of a mantle, or another configuration, feel free to get creative. Grab some real, fresh evergreen garland to adorn your mantle. Or, add fresh cut boughs to a porcelain planter and nestle it on the hearth.

PRO TIP: Avoid fresh goods over the mantle if you regularly light your fireplace, as this can dry the greenery. Keep your decor looking fresh by moving it when the fireplace is in use. This also reduces the likelihood that your fresh greens will weep sap. If you're extra concerned about decor weeping sap onto wood furniture, simply dip the end of the cut branch in a melted candle or paraffin wax. This will seal the end and ensure that nearby surfaces don't get sticky.









Arctic Glow

is about calming muted tones, snowflakes, icicles, and reindeer. This trend offers plenty of opportunity here for adding some sparkle and glowing lights everywhere possible.

Fresh Cut Greenery

The star of your indoor decor for this trend is eucalyptus. Whether you're going for a Nordic or Scandinavian feel, or just love the smell, eucalyptus is big across all trends this year. But, it pairs particularly well with this trend. Add some birch logs, stacked neatly by a fireplace. Slice them up for decorative holiday coasters, or lean them in bundles next to your front door.

Sparkling and shining artificial decorative sprigs work well in outdoor holiday planters. Select white and metallic accents. Mix them into bundles of fresh cut boughs of boxwood, juniper, and pine. For an extra touch, add sleighbells to door swags for some extra cheer when opening to see guests or retrieve packages.

Decor Feature

The Tree | Though there's ample opportunity to go big with this trend in every major decor opportunity, trees provide a great showcase. The central tree in your home is a glorious culmination of your decor theme. Whether you choose fresh trees or artificial trees, select ornaments featuring icicles, snowflakes, and woodland animals.



Cardinal Calling


reminds us of the natural beauty and warmth of the season. Find lanterns, cardinal ornaments, decorative birdhouses amongst warm red plaids and stripes.

Fresh Cut Greenery

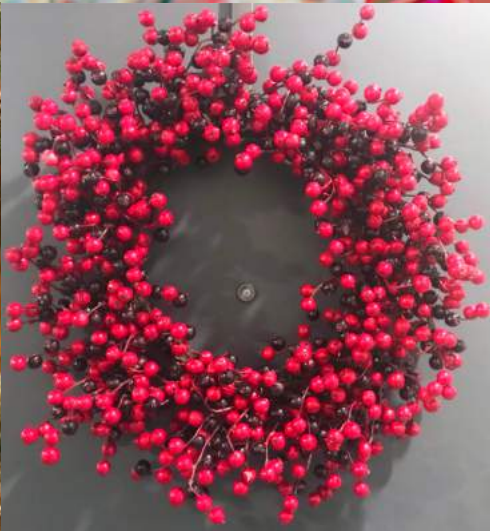
Go traditional with your live boughs in your planters, tablescape, and in-home vase decor. Choose red dogwood branches with white cedar, fir, pine, or boxwood boughs as the perfect pairings. If possible, add real or faux berry branches into the mix.

Decor Feature

Front Door & Entryway | Joyfully welcome guests with the cheerful scene of snow-covered birdhouses on a front entryway table or buffet. Embrace the opportunity to place a bright red berry wreath on your front door to highlight this trend for visitors. Continue the berries and birds theme by including berry branches or picks in outdoor planters that flank the entry. Mix fresh boxwood, red dogwood branches, white cedar greens, and fir greens into planters, swags, and garlands.



PRO TIP: Try hanging a small decorative birdhouse on the red dogwood branches and securing it with fishing line to continue the trend. These elements look stunning when contrasted with white snow. Add white pebbles as a planter filler or in a manner similar to a soil cover to keep the contrast when snow is scarce.



Cardinal Calling







Farmhouse Festive

offers a polished, yet relaxed holiday mood. Buffalo plaids are the star, here, and pair well with more rustic items like pine cones, reclaimed wood, and burlap pillows. Snowmen provide a friendly touch and offer an opportunity to incorporate buffalo check into their scarves.

Fresh Cut Greenery

Incense cedar, white pine, and spruce boughs make great accents to this theme. Decorative milk pails look fantastic with a jubilee of greenery and artificial shiny red berry picks. Tie a cheerful swag with a buffalo plaid bow or fix one onto your wreath. If you're into adding miniature wreaths on your cabinets, try using a buffalo check grosgrain ribbon to hang them.

Decor Feature

Dining Table | With a trend that is all about creating a relaxed atmosphere, the tablescape is where everyone comes together. Real wood chargers, pinecones, and snowmen can all be a feature in your table. Cut magnolia branches or coned cedar branches add texture and a sophistication and warmth along a table runner. Add color through decorative drinking glasses. They'll sparkle and shine when reflecting a little candlelight from decorative hurricane vases. Create decorative snowmen place card holders to top it off.



Colorful Indoor Holiday Blooms

It may seem like winter is a time for dull and monochromatic colors, but these blooms are here to prove us all wrong!

Amaryllis

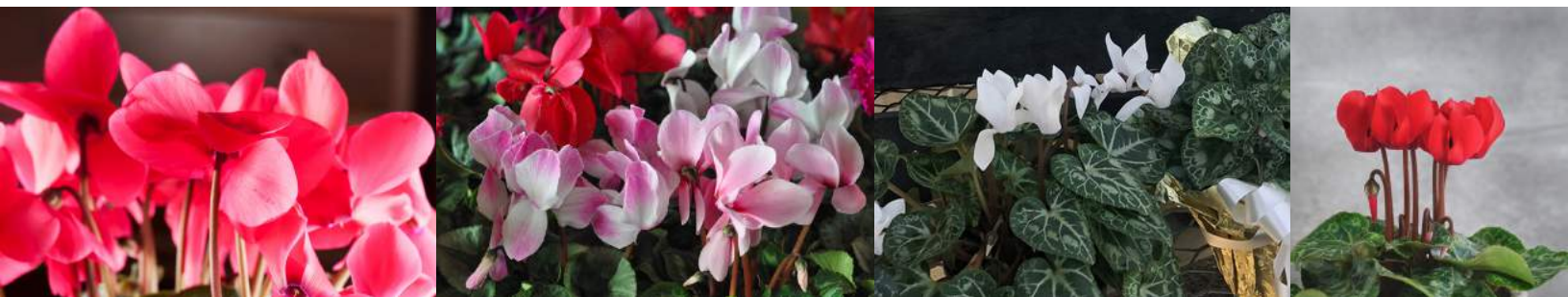
These tropical flowers, originating from a large bulb, are often given as gifts and are a sign of the holiday spirit. These bulbs are one of few that perform well in partial or indirect sunlight. They can be found in a multitude of colors, though the popular varieties for the holidays are often red, white, pink, and variegated. The flower is a symbol of intense beauty, determination, and love.





Christmas Cactus

Originating in the Amazon rainforest, this plant is known for its flat leaves that look as though they've been strung together. The end of each string typically ends in a white, red, pink, or variegated flower. Because the flowers are beautiful when viewed at any angle, they are equally beautiful on a side table or in a hanging planter. While called a cactus, this plant is actually in the succulent family.



Cyclamen

While this plant may be new to novice gardeners or houseplant owners, it's rapidly gaining in popularity. They produce bunches of white, red, or pink flowers all through fall and winter. Arrange clusters of these plants in a decorative container to display on a mantle or side-table.



Paperwhites

These cousins to the daffodil are said to represent youthful innocence, goodness, faith, understanding, new beginnings, and honesty. Many know paperwhites for clusters of flowers atop sturdy stems. Grow the bulbs in stones in a decorative container. Place the pot or container in indirect light to prolong bloom time.



Poinsettia

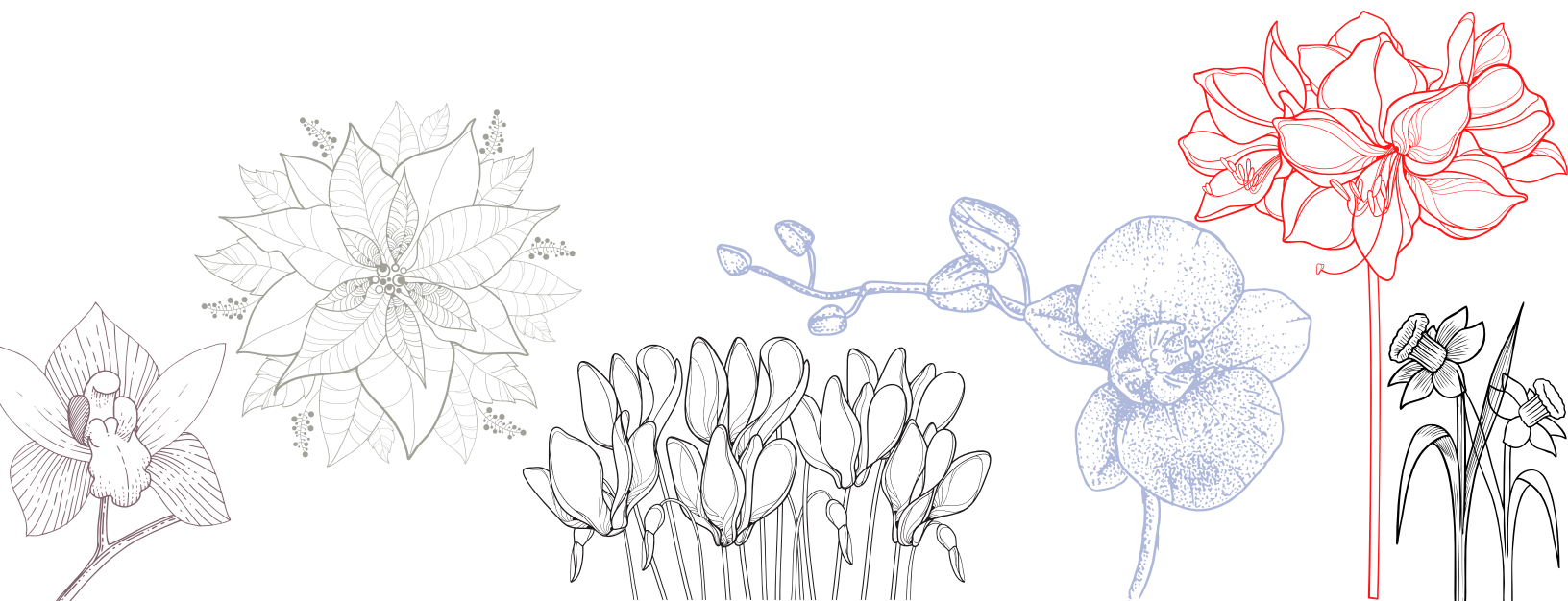
Often associated with the Christmas season, poinsettias are often a staple in household decor schemes. It's easy to see why. Poinsettias come in a variety of colors like white, pink, magenta, variegated, and even (painted) blue! Originating from Mexico, these plants symbolize purity, success, and good cheer.

Some may have shied-away from decorating with these stunning plants, due to their potential toxicity to children and pets if consumed. However, a pet or child would need to consume a large amount of poinsettia leaves in order to fall ill. Platt Hill Nursery works closely with the ASPCA and staff is happy to help determine what is best for your household's needs.



Orchids

Orchids have been long seen as a luxurious, exotic, and elegant addition to any space. They come in a nearly endless array of colors and easily brighten any room. So, it's easy to see how these flowers have a place in holiday decor. They're believed to represent love, refinement, fertility, innocence, and thoughtfulness, but their meaning varies depending on the flower's color.



Miniature Gardens

Many of us may not think of houseplants as a “garden.” But, Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines the term as:

- a) a plot of ground where herbs, fruits, flowers, or vegetables are cultivated
- b) a rich well-cultivated region
- c) a container planted with usually a variety of small plants

Definition “c” has become continually popular to define our efforts during the winter season. A houseplant collection or combination-type pot can easily be called a miniature garden. A few examples of commonly known miniature garden styles include:

- Terrariums
- Fairy Gardens
- Herb Gardens

Miniature indoor gardens, as a concept, have been steadily gaining popularity over the last few years. These also make for unique and thoughtful gifts. In general, plants are great gifts for coworkers, friends, and family who are otherwise hard to buy for.

Why not make one of these charming gardens this year for yourself or a friend or family member? Or, purchase ready-made miniature gardens or terrariums at Platt Hill Nursery.





January Jump-Start

It's a new year, and maybe even a new you! If you haven't started yet, try your hand at growing some plants in 2021. Start small, and be sure to consult a knowledgeable professional for advice and ideas. Make that so-called "black thumb" turn green in 2021!

New Year, New Plants (houseplants)

One of the most important elements to consider when looking for a houseplant is: where will it live in your house and what is the light like there? A plant that does best in a location with lots of bright light isn't going to survive well in a dark bathroom that has no windows or natural light. However, there are plants that can survive in lower-light environments. Success with houseplants is largely a matter of understanding which plants are suited best for your space. Luckily, there are many options:

Houseplants for Low Light Areas

- Cast iron plant
- Chinese evergreen
- Peace lily
- Philodendron
- Pothos
- Snake Plant
- Swedish ivy
- Wandering jew
- Zebra Cactus
- ZZ plant





Houseplants for Medium Light Areas

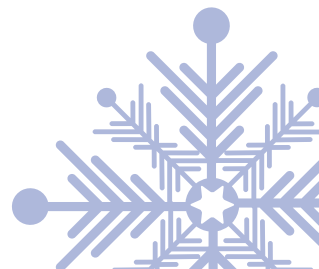
- Arrowhead plant
- Burro's Tail (succulent)
- Cast iron plant
- Dumb cane
- English ivy
- False aralia
- Ferns
- Jade plant (succulent)
- Nerve plant
- Panda plant
- Spider plant
- String of Pearls/Bananas/Dolphins

Houseplants for High Light Areas

- Aloe
- Bird of Paradise
- Cactus
- Croton
- Echeveria (succulent)
- Ficus
- Grape ivy
- Hawthoria (succulent)
- Hoya
- Ponytail palm
- Rubber plant

Several of these plants are recommended for their ability to clean impurities out of our air, thus improving indoor air quality. NASA scientists completed a study to prove which plants are best at purification. In fact, Platt Hill Nursery lists in-store which plants are on NASA's list. Just look for the sign.

Plants can also help you get a more restful sleep. Lavender has long been known for its relaxation effects, as has jasmine. But, not all plants need to be scented to help us relax. English ivy, aloe vera, snake plant, dracaena, peace lily, philodendron, and pothos plants can all have a great impact on our sleep by purifying toxins, eliminating odors, and generating negative ions. Negative ions attach themselves to irritants like dust, mold spores, and bacteria.



Managing Common Indoor Plant Pests

Spider mites

Identification:

You may notice tiny, web-like wisps on your plants signaling these microscopic pests. The actual mite may appear as tiny reddish or brownish-black dots that hang out on the underside of plant leaves.

How to get rid of spider mites:

Use "Eight," which is a ready-to-use spray by Bonide. Once dry, meticulously wipe the plant down with a soft cloth.

Mealybugs

Identification:

These look like small, cottony masses on stems and leaves. These insects often leave a sticky residue on leaves.

How to get rid of mealybugs:

If possible, wash them away with a steady stream of water. It may be best to do this over the sink to allow the bugs fall down the drain, rather than back into the soil. If the infestation is particularly bad, try spraying the plant with Bonide's Neem oil ready-to-use spray or Bonide's Insecticidal soap ready-to-use spray.

Gnats

Identification:

These are small, black flying insects that have a symbiotic relationship with natural funguses that grow in soil. The adults are harmless (though annoying), but the larvae will eat the roots of your plants.

How to get rid of gnats:

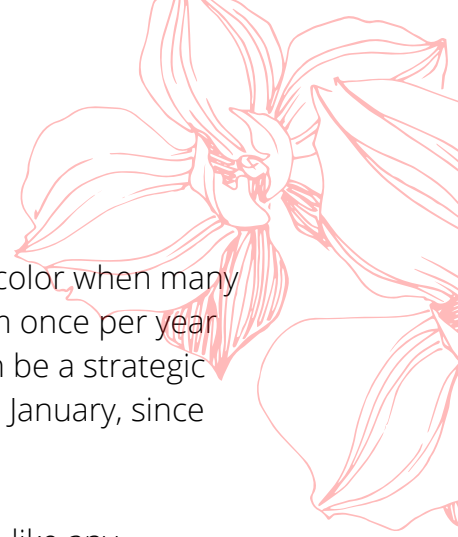
Reduce watering. Fungus Gnats thrive in damp soil. Or, try spraying a homemade mix of water and essential oils of peppermint, cinnamon, and sesame oil. Spray your solution on plants and the soil surface. Sticky traps can also work to capture egg-laying adults when laid semi-horizontally, propped up near the soil. Hanging gnat traps will only work to combat the symptom, rather than the problem.





Orchid Houseplant Care Tips

Orchids are beloved for their ability to bring bright bursts of color when many other plants are done blooming. Generally, orchids will bloom once per year when properly cared for. So, purchasing a plant in-bloom can be a strategic decision. These make the perfect indoor plant to purchase in January, since they'll add some new life to your winter houseplants.



Orchids can sometimes get a reputation for being difficult to grow. But, like any misunderstood plant, they're not difficult; just different. If you buy an orchid from a reputable nursery, your orchid is likely happy and healthy. Because of this, it likely can remain in its nursery container for a few years with the proper water, sunlight, and care.

Water your orchid with distilled water or rainwater if possible. They can tolerate tap water, but can be sensitive to mineral build-up on their roots. If you notice mineral build-up, flush the potting medium with distilled water until the mineral build-up dissipates. Or, better yet, repot into some fresh potting medium.



PRO TIP: The main instance where tap water is not recommended? Softened water. Orchids can be sensitive to water minerals that cause its pH to be outside of their preferred 5.5-6 (slightly acidic) range.

While some plant tags may instruct orchid owners to water their orchid once per week using an ice cube, this is generally not recommended. An ice cube can cause temperature changes for the orchid that make it more difficult to maintain a healthy root system.

If the orchid becomes dislodged from its planting medium, it may be necessary to reseat it. If you'd planned to move your orchid from its nursery container to another decorative pot, it may be easiest to replant it in a different vessel at this time (when/if disturbed).

The most commonly seen orchid variety in day-to-day life (grocery stores, hardware stores, special event arrangements) is the Phalaenopsis orchid. This plant is actually in the air plant family and is easily damaged or killed by overwatering. Because of this, it's important to choose a planting medium that won't become waterlogged. Espoma's Orchid Potting Mix is a great, reliable option for Phalaenopsis orchids.



Attracting Winter Birds

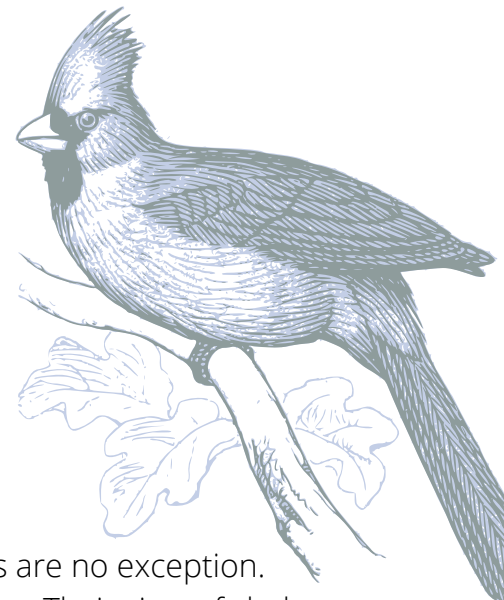
Why attract birds?

Birds are a beneficial and important part of a garden's ecosystem. In addition to birds' unique beauty, delightful songs, and entertaining dances and hops through the landscape, they offer many practical benefits. When we attract and support non-migratory birds during the winter, they'll come to visit our spring and summer gardens too. (Migratory populations can also depend on the resources we provide them, but they're less likely to trust unknown food sources than birds that stay all year.)



Birds provide natural pest control, particularly during the spring when they're nesting and then feeding their young. The hungry baby birds can eat hundreds of insects per day. Depending on the species, the young birds may need to eat every 10-20 minutes for 12-14 hours each day. Insects are actually the most-consumed part of bird diets, rather than fruit or seeds. According to Bird Watchers Digest, only a few groups of birds (finches, doves) can survive a full lifecycle on seeds alone. So, if we attract and support birds throughout winter, populations will begin to see our gardens as places where they can consistently find food all year long. And thus, will offer natural pest control that reduce harmful insect populations on our plants.

Additionally, birds are recognized by the USDA Forest Service as important pollinators. We may typically think of bird pollinators as those that sip nectar from long-throated blooms. This is definitely true; hummingbirds are an important pollinator in our plant ecosystem. However, any bird that shakes a blossom when landing on a branch or brushes-up against blooms when capturing a nearby insect has the potential to assist in pollination.



How to attract birds in winter

Every living animal requires water, food, and shelter to survive. Birds are no exception. They'll seek shelter during storms, wind, and particularly cold weather. Their view of shelter may vary depending on species, but some will seek protection amongst the denser branches of evergreen shrubs and trees. Some birds will shelter in empty birdhouses or nesting boxes. Just ensure your birdhouses and nesting boxes are out of reach of predators. (Some can jump several feet in the air!)



If you haven't gotten around to cleaning out and maintaining birdhouses in late fall, now is the time. Clean with a diluted bleach solution and repair any cracks or gaps that threaten the birdhouse's structural integrity. Cleaning is important to reduce the spread of bacteria and viruses that can reduce bird populations. The same cleaning method is recommended for feeders and heated bird baths, but on a more frequent schedule to keep bird diseases at bay.

Keep bird feeders near birdhouses and evergreens. Ensure they're well-stocked with dry seed to increase the likelihood that they'll survive cold, harsh winters. Once birds become aware of easy food sources like feeders, they may come to rely on that food to bring them through winter. Hulled peanuts, millet seed, thistle seed, black oil or striped sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, or mixes containing rapeseed or flax often appeal to a variety of bird



species. Cornell University's *Project Feederwatch* has an excellent resource to match the type of birdfeeder and birdseed to the birds you're looking to attract. If the seed looks too wet or caked-on, it's time to clean (or about once every month or two). Birdseed that retains too much moisture can harbor mold and bacteria, which is bad for the birds. Suet feeders are also a great

option to provide a quick hit of high-energy food. Since suet often means binding seed together with animal fat, they're a great source of protein.

Bird baths are important to provide water for birds when natural sources are frozen. Adding a bird bath de-icer is essential to provide for our winged friends during the cold. Make sure to clean bird baths at least weekly to reduce the spread of disease.

There's a close relationship to specific birds' insect preference, seed preference, and tree or shrub preference. The Illinois Department of Natural resources has some great pointers. The Audubon Society also helps connect the dots. But, your local nursery and garden center experts are a great resource, too; it's hard to really know plants without understanding at least a few of the food chains that surround them. So, help our feathered friends this year by ensuring your yard provides all it can for their food, water, and shelter needs.





February Frolic

Spring is right around the corner, but this can feel hard to believe in early February. As one of the months that can cause many-a-Chicagoan to ask, *"Why do I live here, again?"* February often brings sub-zero temperatures, ice, and snow.

But, we're here to help you focus on those brief glimpses of sunlight! This month, we'll highlight a few plant-things perfect for the month of love. Plus, we provide some ideas on how to prepare for the season ahead.


Seeds: Sort, Organize, & Store

Consider organizing and storing your seeds in a more formal way this year. Instead of a bunch of seed packets strewn about in kitchen drawers, laundry rooms, garages, or potting sheds, collect up all the seeds you purchased and collected from the prior year in a central location. Believe it or not, greeting card organizers, recipe card organizers, and photo files work especially well for seed storage.

The trick to sorting and organizing your seeds in the most useful way will involve the following pieces of information:


- What plant will it grow?
- Should it be sown indoors first?
 - When (week or date) should the seeds be sown indoors?
 - Do the seeds need a heat mat to sprout?
 - Do the seeds need refrigeration to sprout?
 - When should the seedlings be transplanted outdoors?
- Should it be directly-sown outdoors? When?
- Are there beneficial companion plantings?
- Are there poor companion plantings?



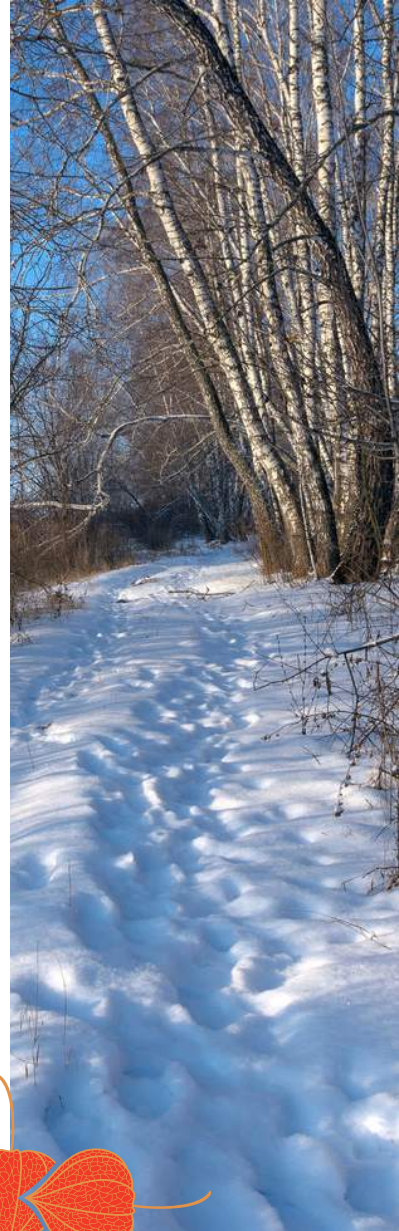


Ideally, this information is visible from the face of the divider or folder within your storage system. The remainder of the information the plant needs to achieve optimal growth rates are typically found on the reverse of the packet (if purchased). But, the above questions will be important factors in organization. Place seeds in the storage box according to when you'll need to take action. To be sure you don't miss sowing windows, simply add a reminder on your calendar to check the seed storage. It'll be easy to see which seeds to start that week.

If you have multiple storage containers, make sure to label the outside of the box or filing system to make your organization method easy to understand. For example: if you have one seed storage box for flowers and another for vegetables, then label them accordingly.



PRO TIP: If you have multiple seed packets for the same type of plant (i.e. different kinds of pumpkins), it might be best to sort seed packets according to the oldest one first. Seeds won't germinate consistently if they're kept for several years without being sown.



Plants That Were Practically *Made* for Valentine's Day

As some frantically search the web for the best Valentine's Day gift, the experts at Platt Hill Nursery are cool as a cucumber. Did you know that several plants sport heart-shaped leaves? How about that some of the trendiest plants to own today have pink leaves? We've got the scoop on three houseplants you may not realize are perfect for your special someone.

Perfect for hanging baskets or a vertical garden, gifting the heart-shaped **hoya** offers wishes of wealth and protection.



Chinese evergreens have often been associated with good luck, blessings, and best wishes. Your sweetheart will enjoy the beautiful and unique splashes of pink on this foliage. They're often confused with **polka dot plants**. Though, it's easier to see the difference when viewed side-by-side (like here).



Chinese evergreen



Polka dot



Tri-color prayer plant



To symbolize your gratitude for your friend or loved one, gift a **tri-color prayer plant**. They're striped with a variety of hues that range from pink to magenta to silver and communicate devotion to your recipient.



Mosaic plants (aka nerve plant) signify harmony and modesty. Available in both white and pink, look for the veining to be the colorful star.

For a person whom you esteem but don't love, a **Wandering Jew** plant (or, less commonly called, inch plant) is your go-to. Show your appreciation with this magenta-purple toned plant.



Mosaic plant



Wandering Jew



Kick-Off Sowing Season

Late February brings the start of our springtime prep. For gardeners anxious to get their hands back into soil (well, seed starting mix), February offers the first reminder of getting back into the outdoor garden.

Vegetable & herb garden seeds to start in late February:

- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Lavender
- Lettuce
- Mint
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Strawberries

Flower seeds to start in February:

- Begonias
- Black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckias)
- Coleus
- Coneflower (Echinacea)
- Delphiniums
- Geraniums
- Impatiens
- Pansies
- Pentas
- Shasta Daisies
- Snapdragons
- Statice
- Violas

NOTE: Not all flower seeds have to be started in February, but some will benefit from being planted as early as possible in order to get the longest growing season. This is particularly true if you're looking to create a cutting garden.

Starting Seeds Indoors in Winter

Once you know what you might want to plant, it's important to have the right equipment. Here's what you might need:

- Seed starting mat
- Seed starting trays
- Seed starting soilless mix

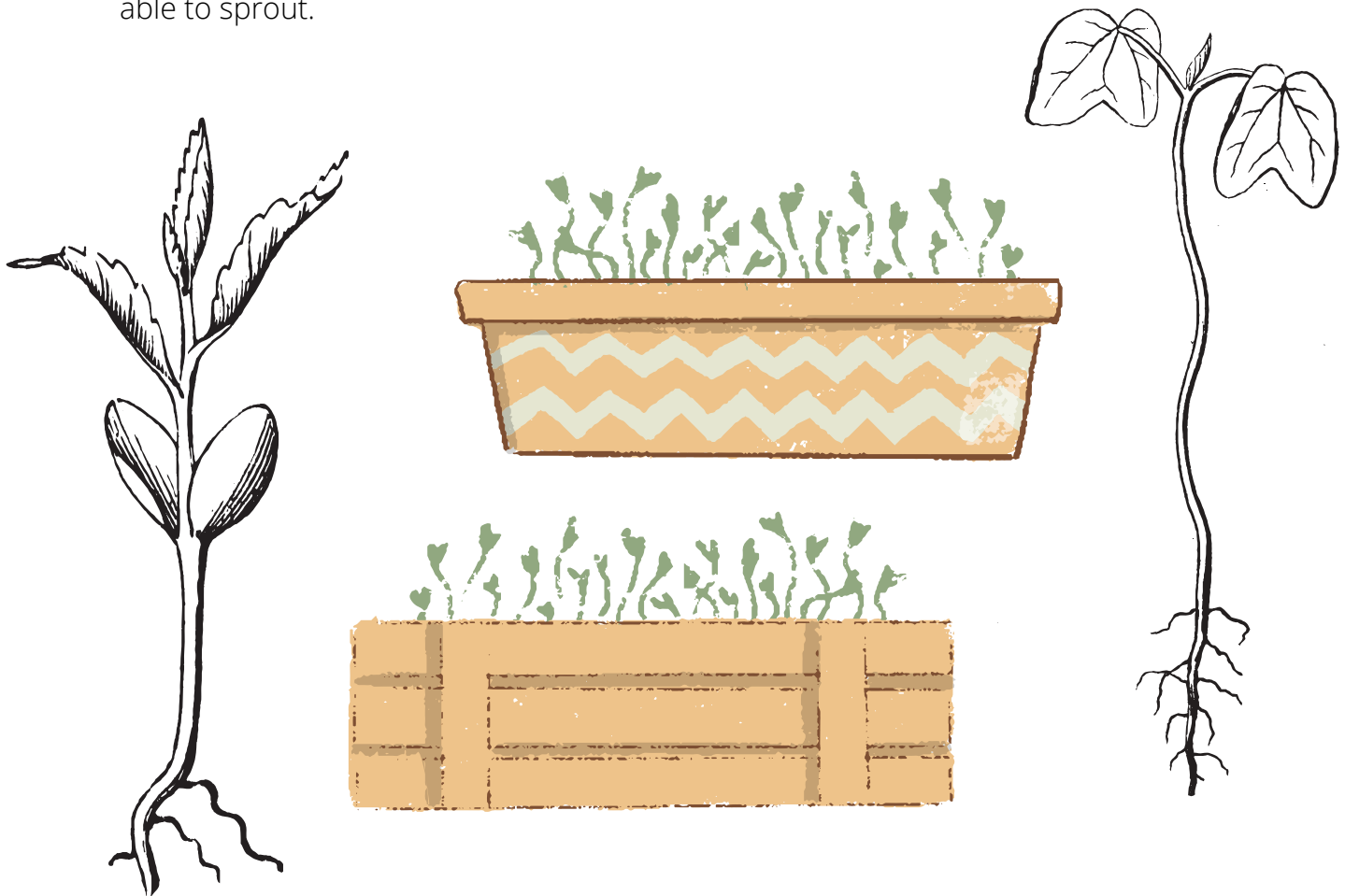


Selecting a soilless mix helps keep your sowing medium light. Seeds will be able to germinate much easier when they're not battling heavy soils and an environment that is overly moist. So, soilless seed starting mixes offer the perfect balance. It's still important not to overwater your seeds and seedlings, though - that could invite bacteria and fungi to take up residence.



If you have older seeds, check for viability:

Check if seed packets are worth sowing by placing a few seeds on a damp paper towel. Maintain moisture throughout the next few days. If possible, place these seeds on a seed starting mat to provide a boost. Check your seed packet to see how long it typically takes the variety to germinate. If they sprout, then gently remove the seed from the paper towel (it's ok if a tiny bit of paper towel comes with it) and sow according to the directions on the packet. That way, you won't waste valuable seed starting space on seeds that are no longer able to sprout.





Your Weekend Checklist

Thank you for taking time to read and enjoy our Winter Garden Guide. If you found it useful, please consider sharing a photo of your fall garden and tag "@plathillnursery." (Also, make sure to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).)

We wish you a joyful winter season and hope to see you again for our spring guide!

November 13-15

- Visit Platt Hill Nursery for the annual Christmas Open House event!
- NOV 14** | Happy Diwali! Celebrate the Hindu new year and celebration of light with new candles, flowering plants, and gifts for the home from Platt Hill Nursery.

November 20-23

- Continue to collect remaining fallen leaves outdoors
- Plant amaryllis bulbs indoors for a great display of flowers in about 6-8 weeks
- NOV 21** | Visit Platt Hill Nursery's fresh tree lot to get first pick of this year's trees
- NOV 26** | Happy Thanksgiving! We give thanks and wish for your health and happiness this winter

November 27-29

- Shop for holiday gifts - See the Platt Hill Nursery Gift Guide on P.11
- Decorate for the holidays with evergreen wreaths, garlands, and fresh greenery in planters
- Purchase your live Christmas trees - visit Platt Hill Nursery's tree lot
- Move houseplants closer to a sunny window to get as much light as possible during the shorter daylight hours





December 4-6

- Buy cut stems of holiday foliage like evergreens and winterberry branches to decorate your outdoor containers and window boxes
- Prune grapevines - cut back side branches to one or two buds from the main stem
- Check stored crops for signs of rot or deterioration
- Check overwintering and indoor plants for signs of spider mites and treat if necessary
- DEC 5 |** World Soil Day + Youth Climate Action Day
- DEC 10 |** Happy Hanukkah! Celebrate the beginning of Hanukkah with white cyclamen, paperwhites, or snowdrops. Or, look for blue poinsettias

December 11-13

- Make note of opportunities in your garden or landscape for evergreens and other winter-interest plantings
- Check stored bulbs/corms for signs of deterioration or rot
- Winter prune fruit trees
- Deadhead indoor flowering plants like Cyclamen to encourage more blooms

December 18-20

- Finish holiday gift shopping. Don't Forget! Plants make great gifts for those who are harder to buy for
- Purchase succulents and miniature houseplants for miniature gardens you'll create as holiday gifts
- DEC 19 |** It's *Look for an Evergreen Day* - if you haven't already, purchase your Christmas tree or evergreen greenery today

December 25-27

- Hang bird feeders near roses to attract hungry birds that will also pick off any overwintering pests
- Prune black currants once dormant - remove about a quarter of the old stems
- DEC 25 |** Merry Christmas! Celebrate with locally-grown poinsettias, evergreens, and your favorite holiday bulbs like paperwhites - All available at Platt Hill Nursery
- DEC 26 |** Happy Kwanzaa! Celebrate with red poinsettias or evergreens - Both available at Platt Hill Nursery





January 1-3

- Check for rot on stored bulbs and tubers, and ensure dahlia and canna tubers haven't totally dried out
- Sort through seeds (old and new), discarding old or empty packets, and organize the remainders
- When snow falls, knock it off evergreen shrubs and hedges to prevent them bending and snapping under snow load
- JAN 5** | National Bird Day

January 8-10

- Prune climbing roses between now and February
- Winter prune fruit trees and shrubs to remove congested and diseased branches
- Stop by Platt Hill Nursery to find your newest houseplant

January 15-17

- Check overwintering plants for signs of spider mites and treat if necessary
- Well before nesting season begins, hang or nail-up birdhouses in sheltered spots like tree trunks or walls
- Trim back ivy and other creeping plants before birds begin nesting (trimming late might otherwise disturb them)

January 22-24

- While it's not in use, give your lawn mower a tune-up or take it to a repair shop for basic service
- If you didn't get to it in fall, make sure to clean and sharpen your garden tools including garden hoes, forks, shears, and snips.
- JAN 25** | Happy Chinese New Year! Welcome, Year of the Ox!

January 29-31

- Repot orchids after flowering (especially if they look like they're about to burst out of their pot)
- JAN 30** | Celebrate national seed swap day





February 5-7

- Sow mustard and cress for microgreens, place on a sunny and warm windowsill for sprouts in a few weeks
- Make or buy a cold frame to help harden-off plants in spring
- It might seem early, but start planning landscaping projects before the crowds hit
- Now is the time to book landscaping help

February 12-14

- Re-pot houseplants in preparation for springtime growth
- Clean bird feeders and refill with fresh seed
- Purchase a plant for your Valentine from Platt Hill Nursery
- FEB 14** | Happy Valentine's Day! Celebrate your loved ones with flowers that will continue to grow!

February 19-20

- Prune late-summer flowering clematis, cutting back to healthy buds about a foot from the base of the plant
- Purchase appropriate fertilizers or soil additives to be ready for garden application in a few weeks
- Purchase seed starting materials like seed trays, soilless mix, and seeds - Or, prepare containers/trays you'll re-use from the prior year by scrubbing them with dish soap and thoroughly rinsing

February 26-28

- Sow select flower or vegetable seeds indoors
- Cut down ornamental grasses left standing over winter
- FEB 28** | Celebrate Floral Design Day by creating a beautiful arrangement for your home.



