

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful." Norman Vincent Peale

Every December my entire family looks forward to gathering on our ranch where my mom, brother, and nephew decorate over an acre of land with thousands of twinkling lights, and every imaginable Christmas scene. Since I was a little girl, this was the wonder my parents weaved to ensure that Santa and his reindeer would find their way to our remote wilderness hideaway. The holidays are special because of family traditions and imagination on overload. It's been a year of exploring, experimenting, and experiencing. According to the Mayan calendar, the world as we know it is going to end on Dec. 21. Are we prepared? Let's pamper ourselves, our families, and our guests with a dazzling, sparkling season of light, love, and laughter by greening our spirit. This is your passport to outdoor pleasure, purpose, and passion.

- RAKE leaves from lawns to keep them from matting. Keep mower at a higher cutting level.
- WINTERIZE your shrubs and bushes with a dormant feeding, the last one of the season.
- DEADHEAD roses for a final flush of blooms throughout the holidays. Next month will be the heavy pruning.
- REPAIR damaged cells by eating berries. Berries are nature's brain food. Polyphenols give berries their deep colors-red, blue, black, activating proteins that break down and recycle the toxic chemicals. Blueberries are high in antioxidants, acai berries contain high levels of omega -6 and omega -9 fatty acids to help the heart, and strawberries are loaded with vitamin C.
- FASHION wreaths from boughs of redwood, pine, fir, and grapevines.
- FORAGE for fresh watercress to add to winter salads in nearby creeks or wetlands. Make sure to thoroughly wash the greens before eating.
- PROTECT tender plants from frost and freeze by moving potted plants inside or close to the house.
- WATER plants when dry as they will suffer less damage from the cold when they are well watered.
- BUY camellias now in the colors to suit your landscape décor while they are stocked as blooming specimens in nurseries.
- BAKE a personalized garden fruitcake this holiday using real fruits-fresh, frozen, or dried from your own earth. Grapes, peaches, apricots, figs, and pears are magnificent choices for a different type of holiday treat.
- DON'T eat mushrooms from your garden unless you are 100 percent certain that they are edible. Numerous look-alike champignons are toxic and even deadly.
- CUT back chrysanthemums to six inches.
- REMOVE dead foliage from shrubs and bushes and add to compost bin.
- PLANT peony, calendula, oriental poppy, and lily of the valley for spring blooms. Bare root offerings to plant now include asparagus, artichoke, rhubarb, grapes, and berries.
- USE no more than three strands of lights plugged into one cord or outlet to prevent fire.
- DECORATE with bromeliads and antheriums for a hint of the tropics.
- BE original in customizing your holiday decorating with non-traditional items from succulents to roses with lantern accents.
- ADD luster to potted noble firs by adding sprigs of amaryllis and hydrangeas to the arrangement.
- SAVOR families and friends this holiday season and every moment of the year. Growing people is the greatest gift of all.

Happy Holidays from my noble garden to yours! Ring in the New Year with a gardener's glee.

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