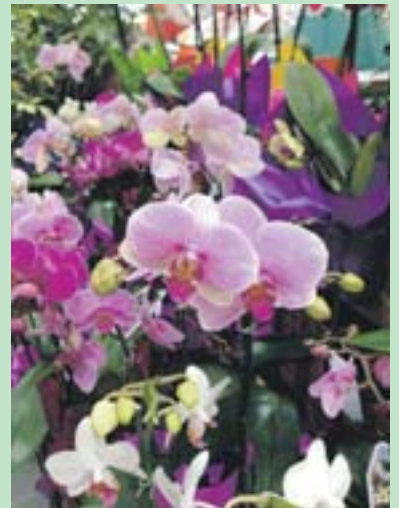


# Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

*"Christmas is not in tinsel, lights, and outward show. The secret lies in an inner glow." – Wilfred Peterson, "The Art of Living"*

What would the holidays be without the high voltage displays of thousands of twinkling lights illuminating our landscapes? We drive around neighborhoods oohing and aahing at the inflatable snowmen waving to us, Santa's sleigh on the rooftops tethered to his blinking reindeer, and flickering candy canes hanging from tree branches. The festival of lights is upon us as we hark the heralded angels and remember the reason for the season. Light a fire in your heart and shine brightly with love. Tidy your garden, then, enjoy the merriment.

- **CONSIDER** purchasing a living Christmas tree instead of a cut one. Garden centers have a selection of cypress, pine, fir, and even rosemary clipped to resemble a Christmas tree. Place your tree in a beautiful copper container, or wrap with festive fabric. Live trees will survive year after year and prices are reasonable.
- **FERTILIZE** shrubs and trees after all the leaves have fallen to provide food to last for the season.
- **RAKE** the over abundance of leaves in your gardens to add to the compost pile.
- **SURROUND** yourself with colorful orchids or amaryllis to chase away the winter blues.
- **PLANT** pansies, violas, and cyclamen to brighten your beds.
- **ADD** texture and drama to your indoor décor with spiky long lasting bromeliads.
- **INCORPORATE** plenty of organic matter into new beds that you are preparing for spring. Double dig to ensure the best results.
- **CLEAN** garden equipment, patio furniture, and remove leaves from water features. Sharpen shears and oil your tools to protect them from rusting.
- **SERVICE** mowers and tillers to avoid the spring rush.
- **PRUNE** dormant fruit trees including peach, apricot, prune, plum, apple, and pear. Save the wood for barbecues next summer.
- **CUT** any dead or damaged branches from all trees and shrubs.
- **CHECK** any stakes or ties on smaller trees to make sure they are sturdy enough to withstand strong winter winds.
- **WINTERIZE** your wonderland by pruning and shaping wisteria, honeysuckle, berry bushes, and perennials.
- **SORT** containers. Move any frost tender pots to a sheltered area.
- **CLEAR** vegetable beds that have finished cropping.
- **SOW** cover crops such as alfalfa, lima beans, and peas to increase the nitrogen in your soil.
- **PICK** persimmons, pomegranates, quince, and lemons to use in displays and holiday cooking.
- **CREATE** wreaths and garlands from branches of grapevines, redwoods, pines, and other conifers.
- **GATHER** pinecones, berries, twigs, and grasses to add to your arrangements.
- **ATTRACT** birds to your backyard throughout the cold months by keeping feeders filled and baths ready.
- **DECORATE** a sapling with dollar bills to give as the perfect house-warming gift!
- **DEADHEAD** roses for a final flush of blooms for the New Year.
- **ADD** sparkle and pizzazz to your porch by spraying your left over pumpkins and gourds gold, silver, or bronze. They'll look like jewels.
- **DRINK** a glass of tart cherry juice before bedtime to boost your melatonin and help you sleep better. Making a hot valerian tea works wonders too, but don't combine with alcohol or other sedative drugs.
- **PUREE** mint leaves with garlic and olive oil for a winter fresh pesto to put over pasta, bread, and fish.
- **LIGHT** up your decorations with battery powered twinkle lights, or other outdoor lights set to timers. Trees trimmed with lights inspire delight.
- **PICK** carrots for Rudolph and the reindeer, and don't forget to leave yummy persimmon cookies for Jolly St. Nick on Christmas Eve.



*On a dreary day, there is nothing better than filling your rooms with orchids.*

Get up, get out, and get growing while you celebrate the holly jolly. Give the greatest gift of all – the light of love. Believe in the magic and get glowing!

Happy Gardening to You!

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## WINTER TIPS

Cleaning and thinning your trees may reduce the potential storm hazards without compromising the shade. In some situations the risk of failure cannot be reduced without removal of branches. Remember that healthy structurally sound trees are generally wind fast even when mature.

Storm damage is usually, but not always, related to structural problems that could have been addressed with proper structural training when the tree was young. Co dominant (two trunks with a narrow angle of attachment) trunks account for many trees failures. The hazard of wind damage is higher on the regrowth of trees that have been "topped".

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