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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To the 12 month a year Gardener
Pete Kauzlarich, WSU Extension Master Gardener

What does the gardener do in December? The true gardener lives year around and is always thinking, planning, working at gardening. The FCG (Ferry County Gardener) is hopefully enjoying all the fruits of his/her labor, opening up the canned fruits and vegetables, the frozen items, or the stored potatoes, onions, fruits from the root cellar, relaxing ... and planning.

The FCG never forgets where he/she lives, and the cold weather reminds us. Most of us here live in USDA growing zone 4b, -25F to -20F, unless you are at the higher elevations. If you've lived here long enough, you know there have been a few years that got colder, but then there are years that are not this cold. But we know we have to prepare for the worst.

Here are a few things the FCG considers in the December and winter months:

- Restock bird feeders.
- Twist and coil long stems of Virginia creeper into a Christmas wreath base.
- Check stored vegetables, tubers, and bulbs; remove any spoiled ones immediately.
- Try to keep roses and other half-hardy perennials covered with snow—it's the perfect insulator against cold.
- Start seeds of zonal geraniums (*Pelargonium* spp.).
- Review your notes from the last growing season.
- On a warm day, trim back and mulch perennials.
- Collect the seeds from pods and seed heads gathered earlier—wrap up some to give as holiday gifts.
- Continue harvesting greens from the hoop house or cold frame if used.
- Try growing salad greens and herbs in pots in a south-facing window.
- Take photos of your property to decide what needs changing before snow cover obscures your view if it hasn't already.
- Cover spinach and other overwintering crops with a row cover, and then top with 8 inches of straw.
- Make holiday decorations from holly and evergreen pruning's.
- Wrap trees to protect them from deer and rabbits.
- Force some paper white narcissus bulbs: Put them in a bowl with pebbles and water, set the bowl in a bright cool window, then enjoy the show.
- Don't keep a live Christmas tree indoors for more than a week or two—plant it in the hole you dug last month.
- Inspect houseplants for insect pests; treat with insecticidal soap spray, if necessary.
- Begin planning next year's garden.
- Browse through new seed catalogs and order early to avoid disappointment.
- Remember your zone (4b) when you order trees and other perennial plants.

I'm sure there are many other things that the 12-month gardener does this time of year. The true FCG at heart never lives a day without looking ahead to the next venture in the garden. Above all, enjoy the relaxation and fun with family and friends this season, and start the next year with your feet on the ground waiting for that snow to melt and that ground to thaw, so you can garden once again.

And don't forget to contact our WSU office, located at the bottom floor of the Courthouse for information on just about any gardening subject. Happy gardening everyone. 509-775-5225, x1116, jordant@wsu.edu, 350 E. Delaware Ave. #9 Republic, WA 99166 in the basement of the Courthouse. For Extension publications go to <https://pubs.wsu.edu/>.