

Can You Dig It?

Well here we are again....the start of another new yearthe season of gray skies, snow and wind....but also the season to think about the future, to dream about all those new things we want to do, and to plan our gardens....digging thru those great seed catalogues that seem to appear miraculously right after we celebrate the new year.

In addition to our very wonderful committee members we have two guest writers for this issue....Pam Keeton, TCGC President is writing about birds in the winter, and Terry Holman, FGCMD District I Horticulture Chairman, is sharing some informative and fun gardening "Regrets and New Year's Resolutions" of some of our fellow gardeners in District I.

So sit back, and have that cup of coffee or that glass of wine, and enjoy the Winter 2018 edition of "Can You Dig It."

*Trish Reynolds
Editor*

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Gardening Tasks for the Winter Months

⌘ Trish Reynolds

Sure it is winter, and yes it is cold outside, 30 degrees as I write this column, but there are still tasks that we can do to get ready to enjoy our gardening this spring.

Here are but a few:

- ◆ Organize your tools – sort out the old and broken ones and re-cycle them.
- ◆ Sharpen and oil your shears and scissors, loppers and pruners – maybe take them to an expert to get this done.
- ◆ Order you seeds and bulbs for spring planting – organize the seeds you saved from last year.
- ◆ Don't forget to compost – many of us are making soup and stew and the left-over vegetables, the bits and pieces, are all great to add to your compost over the winter.
- ◆ Late February is the time to cut back your roses, such as the ever popular Knock-Out Roses, as well as pruning your Crape Myrtle.

- ◆ Plan to grow something new – a new variety or cultivar, a new tree or shrub – plan to create a new garden or to expand or maybe redistribute the plants in a current garden, by drawing a plan for the space – take some courses at Adkins Arboretum, a great resource in our own backyard.
- ◆ Clean your house plants of the dust and debris of the winter months – look for pests and diseases on your houseplants – use insecticidal soap or oils to treat many of these.
- ◆ Don't forget the birds. (See following articles.)
- ◆ Set up a calendar or a Journal to record various milestones in your garden....when will you have your first glimpse of forsythia blooming, when do you see your first Snow Drop, when did your Hellebores start to bloom....a great record to look back over the years – record your successes and your failures....this is fun !
- ◆ Catch up on your Garden Magazines – come spring you will be too busy or you will want to be outdoors enjoying the breath of spring with summer to follow.



New Year's Gardening Regrets and Resolutions- 2018

⌘ Terry Holman, District I Horticulture Chairman

Following are the New Year's Gardening Regrets and Resolutions from some of our District I Horticulture Chairmen and our recent District Directors. January is the perfect time to reflect and change our gardening habits for the better. Enjoy!

Regrets: My biggest gardening mistake was bringing oriental bittersweet into my yard. It has widely spread, and I must weed it out of the garden every year.

Resolutions: My resolution each outdoor gardening season is always to try something new or a challenge, often incorporating growing my own plants from seed, like oriental poppies, cardinal flower, and perennial veronica this year. Personal favorite seed source is [swallowtailgardenseeds](#).

Regrets: My regret is not reading (or following) the cultural requirements for a plant, like type of soil, amount of sun and even the zone. I tend to plant like I decorate and put things where I think they will look good, NOT considering if they would thrive where placed.

Resolutions: Plant more perennials and bulbs relegating annuals to pots by my door and pool which will result in less work in the long run!

Regrets: My biggest gardening mistake: Over planting.



Resolutions: Keep building up my garden soil and planting seeds at the appropriate time.

Regrets: My biggest gardening mistake is something that I keep doing every year: spending too much money on annuals, rather than native perennials. I seem to gravitate towards instant gratification of immediate and continuing color throughout the summer. I need to plant a more natural garden, and enjoy the blooms when they emerge.

Resolutions: My resolution for this planting season is to take better care of my garden tools. I always marveled at Martha Stewart who dedicates whole days to cleaning, sharpening, and oiling her tools. But she has staff! (Ask me in October how I did.)

Regrets: This is a toughie. I don't know that I have made many bad mistakes. Maybe it is that I started gardening with my mom and she was a great teacher.

Now had you asked about cooking mistakes, I could write a book!! The funniest mistake was leaving the pumpkin out of a pumpkin pie.

Resolutions:

1. Simplify my gardens. To downsize the garden by getting rid of some plants I don't like or take too much of my time to tend them.
2. Get my garden things out of the garage and clean out my garden room.
3. I want more fun time for me, besides taking care of house and husband, by volunteering, gardening and planning events that are important to me.

Regrets: My biggest "no-no" was forgetting that plants get bigger. I planted some shrubs - example Korean Spice Viburnum (love the scent) and after ten years we finally had to move it along with six other plants from my perennial garden.

Resolutions: To enjoy my garden more and take the time to relax and just enjoy the beauty of the land and nature!

Regrets: My gardening mistakes are many. Most notable is the planting of Lemon Balm and Borage which over-multiplied in my gardens, patios and pavers causing a great amount of time to keep it from taking over. I now NEVER plant anything in my garden that "self-seeds readily."

Resolutions: To realize that the selection of plants for my garden needs to also benefit native insects and nature. I've been selfish selecting plants based on their newness, color, fragrance and disease resistance and haven't considered Nature in any of my decisions. This year I vow to fill my garden with plants that are mutually beneficial and be willing to share my garden with nature's natives. Another resolution is to save money by growing my plants by seed. I spend way too much on plants that offer limited cultivars and imagination. One of my favorite seed sources is Park Seed.

Regrets: It is hard to know where to start when asked to pick my biggest gardening mistake. There are just so many from which to choose. Most are the result of planting the wrong plant in the wrong place. My husband (and garden laborer) claims one is not a real gardener until every plant has been moved three times. The nine bark in its fourth location is finally very happy. However, if I must choose just one giant annoyance and something I would warn others not to do, it would be to plant the perennial Blue Mistflower, *Eupatorium coelestinum*. For more than five years I have worked to eliminate this pest. It has moved to every speck of bare ground it could

find. It is lovely in the early fall when it shows its blue flowers, but every one has the potential to start a population explosion. In a meadow it would be an asset, but not in my garden. There are many natives that attract butterflies that are much easier to control.

Resolutions: My New Year's Resolution is one that I started over a year ago. I read this advice from a famous English gardener whose name I cannot recall. It was her advice on how to garden as one matures. Gradually remove perennials that require the maintenance of deadheading, pruning and dividing and replace them with shrubs that have more than one season of interest. My biggest success so far has been to replace some needy perennials with *Abelia x grandiflora 'Kaleidoscope'*, an easy-care shrub with three seasons of interest. By chance I had planted *Abelia 'Canyon Creek'* several years ago (fell for the tag that said it was a butterfly magnet) and so had already grown to appreciate abelias that did not have that annoying burgundy hue. Virginia sweet spire, *Itea virginica 'Little Henry'* has also won me over as a plant with great three-season interest that requires little care. It does sucker, but that has been a plus as we (the laborer) have begun moving it around the gardens.

Regrets: The biggest mistake I make is in watering. Coming from Severna Park and gardening on a sandy slope where there was never enough water to satisfy my packed garden (I love to have one of everything). Now we have a mysterious irrigation system. I think we have figured out the lawn system but the drip system in the foundation beds doesn't measure up and we have much clay and lots of little ponds that the spring frog population love. So now overwatering seems to be my boo-boo. We've lost a Holly Tree and a Juniper which is almost impossible to kill, according to Eastern Shore Nursery spokesman. So now all plant material is planted high in amended soil so let's hope that stops the plant death at my home on Ayers Square in Easton.

Resolutions: For New Year's Resolution or just the desire to have one of everything here in Easton I would like to plant more trees. My excuse is we have too much lawn on our lot and I would like to help by increasing urban tree canopy. The trees we would like to plant are; Clump River Birch, *Betula nigra* and Fringetree, *Chionanthus virginicus*. Maybe a Redbud, *Cercis canadensis* or a Winterberry Holly, *Ilex verticillata*, would be great too.



Winter Blues

Christie Hamilton

Often, I look forward to January and February...new beginnings, hope, optimism, time to read and remember... and EXHALE before the pace of spring picks up and takes over. Frankly, this year, I was struggling with the requested "CAN YOU DIG IT" assignment and deadline. No one wants to read about the frozen hoses and water buckets in the barns; the fluffy hen whose frozen toes I found lying ON the ground (she's survived, but NOT without special attention); the rooster whose comb and wattles also froze (He's in the garage...also with special attention); or the overturned floating duck house, entombed in the ice until spring?? For sure, there's no January "bon vivitude" here!



When....what to my wondering eyes should appear.....fourteen spirit-lifting Eastern bluebirds at my porch window perched on the edge of the birdbath!! NOW, if this isn't January cheer.....AND....*Can You Dig It?* inspiration!

I monitor 14 bluebird nesting boxes and truly enjoy their company, their song, and

their attention with each season....BUT never more than on these cold, gray days when the streaks of blue settle down to drink at the birdbath and feeders. I do feed them for most of the year, but the draw on these freezing days is definitely the water. Their usual water sources are frozen; they flock to the birdbath with the electric heater, which is more of an attraction than are the mealworms, raisins, and various nut pieces.

My suggestion to cure any Winter Blues is to take thyself to Robin's Nest or AMAZON, for an extension cord and a bird bath heater, and treat yourself and your neighborhood birds to fresh unfrozen water in a birdbath.

These little instruments (two different models are shown in the photos below) are thermostatically controlled so that they only come on when the water will freeze. A birdbath may be ideal for your winter birds, but lacking that, any shallow container will do, such as the dish shown at right.



My birdbath is rather deep, and the birds will not wade in to get a drink, but along with the edge, a stone or a brick in the water will provide another drinking platform. I have given these heaters as gifts for birthdays and Christmas, to friends, to families with small children, to older friends who may not get out so often ANYONE who enjoys seeing and caring for MANY



backyard birds. Birds actually NEED a fresh, UNFROZEN water source to survive. **

** Please, do NOT, implement this suggestion to attract birds IF you or your neighbors have an outdoor cat....for the birds sake! Nuff said!



Where are My Elusive Winter Flowers?

⌘ Janet Mackey

Gardeners have been known to establish challenges for themselves in their gardens. How early did the first pea get harvested? Were there tomatoes before the 4th of July? Was there bounty from the garden to grace the Thanksgiving table?

For me, the challenge is to have something flowering in the garden every month of the year. It's not that hard. Except when there is a really cold January. When the temperatures rose into the balmy 40s mid-month, I scrambled around in hopes of discovering at least a bud on one of the plants I count on for January blossom. While I found a few indications that new life was pumping through stems, things were not looking promising for an actual flower in time.

In a previous garden near Annapolis, I had an absolute certain January flower on my wintersweet shrub (*Chimonanthus praecox* 'Luteus'). I think I need to find a spot for a wintersweet shrub in this garden, too!

My hellebores or Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) had bright green leaf buds emerging under the mulch, but I don't think they could produce a flower in the following two weeks. And there's always a chance that they are Lenten rose rather than Christmas rose since I transplanted them from an unmarked bed. In that case, I'll have months to wait! There was no sign of the snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) that will sprinkle the grass under a lovely old maple. The snowdrops always have flowers by Valentine's Day, but in gentler winters I've had them bloom earlier.



Two of my witch hazels (*Hamamelis intermedia*), are teasing me with the slightest hint of bronzy red on 'Jelena' and yellow on 'Pallida', but I fear they are weeks away from actually unfurling their beautiful spidery petals on a sunny winter day. Last year, 'Jelena' flowered mid-January.

I planted a 'Snow Flurry' camellia in October, and I was so pleased to have it brighten December with a few white flowers in its first season in the garden. I thought for sure some of the buds would hold out for a January show, but I think the low temperatures may have done them in.

So I am left rooting for my winter garden stalwart: sweet box (*Sarcococca confusa*). The little evergreen shrub has lovely dark blue-black berries still on its stems along with little creamy white buds. Perhaps we'll have a sunny afternoon that will be warm enough to coax the little buds to open - providing both a lovely fragrance and the elusive January bloom!



For the Birds

⌘ Pam Keeton

Winter on the Eastern Shore brings a new variety of birds not seen much during summer, such as Juncos, but it also begs for humans to help sustain birds during varying and harsh weather. Seed, suet, fruit and fresh water are needed to help

birds survive during the winter months, and there are some fun, creative and inexpensive ways we can all help.

First, do not cut down dead flowers with seedpods, such as Black-eyed Susans, Cone Flowers, daisies and other seed-bearing flowers, in the fall. Leave the seed pods to feed the birds during

winter months and cut them down in the spring when new growth appears.

Fresh water is one of the most serious needs of birds during winter. When temperatures drop below freezing, consider purchasing a birdbath heater. They can be found online for as little as \$19 and plug into an outdoor outlet. I have two that have lasted three years and it's a treat to watch the birds drink while surrounded by snow. Metal birdbaths placed in sunny locations can also provide fresh water as they heat and thaw snow when the sun shines. Place both near feeders.

Birds also need sources of protein during winter months, when insects are not readily available. Sunflower seed, peanut butter and suet are great sources of protein. Suet is easy to purchase, but when temps go above freezing, you should monitor for spoilage because suet is an animal by-product. You can also make vegetarian suet from vegetable



Birdbath
(Photo by Pam Keeton)

shortening, which has the advantage of not turning rancid when temps go above freezing. Following is a recipe for "vegetarian suet" from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Vegetarian Suet

Crisco or other vegetable shortening can be used in place of animal fat.

From Audubon.org (<http://www.audubon.org/news/make-your-own-suet>)

- 1 1/2 cups shortening (look for palm oil free options)
- 3/4 cups nut butter (any kind)
- 3 1/2 cups wild bird seed
- 1 cup quick oats
- 1/2 cup corn meal

Mix all the ingredients together until blended.

While our gardens are dormant, winter also provides an opportunity to be creative with homemade feeders. Collect pine cones, spread them with peanut butter or suet and cover with bird seed. Hang them in your trees and enjoy watching the birds light upon them. Or create a garland of cranberries, orange and apple slices to adorn a tree. One drawback to enticing birds in our area with fresh fruit is that they are not used to eating it and you might find yourself feeding more squirrels than birds!

Also keep in mind that many winter birds are ground feeders, so spread some seed on the ground, on top of the snow, or purchase or construct a ground feeding station. Doves, among other birds, are ground feeders and are prevalent on the eastern shore during winter.

A bird enjoying peanut butter, seed and orange slices on a pinecone.
(Photo by Pam Keeton)



Preparing for Spring on HoopsyDaisy Farm

⌘ Dede Hoopes

When the editor of 'Can You Dig It?' asked me to write about preparing my cutting garden for spring, the temperature outside was nearly zero degrees. Spring felt very far away. Then, Old Man Winter treated us all to some delightfully warm days, and I found myself running outside to start clearing away fallen branches and debris in the yard. It felt great to be outside in the garden! Even if spring really is still quite a way away.

The tasks in my cutting garden may vary a bit from other cutting gardens, as it is a flower farm - *HoopsyDaisy Farm*.

Season extension in both spring and fall is critical. Therefore, most of the typical spring tasks are actually started in the late fall. My goal is to start planting hardy seedlings before the last frost date in spring, so I amended the soil with compost, prepped the beds, and covered them with mulch which helps with soil and water conservation. Then I start the hardy seedlings in January, with the goal to plant as early as six weeks before the last frost date. This year I am trying *Lathyrus odoratus* (Sweet Peas) for the first time! Hardy

annuals can also be planted in the fall and overwintered outside in our zone. This year I planted Larkspur, Snapdragons and Bells of Ireland outside where they will sprout early and be ready for an earlier harvest.

While I prepped the annual beds early, I left the perennial beds alone so they could provide food and cover for wildlife. In early spring, I will clean up those beds. Some perennials by nature die back to the ground. Others, like Hellebores and Heuchera, retain their leaves and require tidying up in the spring. Spring is also a great time to do any dividing or transplanting of

perennials – catching the plant early in their growth cycle. This year, I have extensive transplanting to do on HoopsyDaisy Farm. I will be moving many of my perennials around the landscape to make room for an increasing number of annuals.

Spring also requires the laborious task of repairing and replacing drip irrigation. For efficiency the entire cutting garden is set up on a timed drip system. The tapes (lines) can overwinter; but each connection and drip tape needs to be run at the start of the season to ensure that there are no leaks and repaired. Once it is in working condition it needs to be consistently monitored through the season.

Once the spring arrives, plant growth tends to come with a fury, especially with perennials like Peonies and hardy annuals like Delphiniums. That makes early plant staking a very important spring job. I use a series of posts and netting to do my staking as a row rather than with individual plants. It is one of the most cumbersome tasks to tackle, but one of the most rewarding in the end. There has been many a season



when I have tried to manipulate my plants into stakes or netting when they were already full grown. Believe me, it doesn't work.

Understanding the health of my soil may be the most important thing I do each spring. A soil test helps me know what, if anything, I need to do to ensure I'll have optimal growing conditions for my plants. I get a professional soil test of my cutting garden every other year in the spring, and I test pH and review levels of nitrogen and phosphorus using a home

soil test during the alternate spring. This has been invaluable. I actually had too much fertilization the first year I built my beds due to soil, LeafGro and compost mix that I used. In addition to adjustments to fertilization, I also add compost in each hole I dig for a new plant, especially those that I am planting around the landscape.

Finally, my favorite early spring task is planning for the upcoming season. Once the weather begins to break, I can really take stock of the garden. I draw out a garden plan which has all my ideas and flowers that I want to grow on it. Is it going to come together as planned? Do I need new trellising? Have I thought about sun patterns correctly? Right now, thoughts of my beds bursting with blooms just seems like a dream knowing that we are not yet out of the cold!

Editor's Note: The Horticulture Committee will be sponsoring a trip to HoopsyDaisy Farm this fall.....what a treat this will be for all of us. I am sure though as you think of spring flowers, call on Dede and come out for some beautiful posies.....a great treat throughout the seasons!



The Spring Vegetable Garden--Two Methods

✳ Chloe Pitard

Spring garden vegetables, the cool weather crops of spinach, lettuce and other salad greens, radishes and beets, need a long cool growing period. They do not do well once the weather gets warm.

Beets take 46 days to maturity according to the seed packet, and mine seem to take longer than that. If they are planted in March, a hot day or two in early April can wreak havoc even if it then gets cold again. The directions for how early you can plant these crops always say something like "as soon as the soil can be worked." In the past this has meant to me a nice day in early March. I have come to believe that my pattern is meant for a climate much colder than what we have in Easton. Some years, many years, (though not this one) the ground barely freezes on the Eastern Shore. And most years, even this one, there are relatively warm spells during all of the winter months. In practice, our ground can be "worked" almost all winter. So we should do it.

Fall Planting: One easy method is to plant in the fall. Last year in mid-November, I planted both seedlings and seeds of spinach and seeds of vit (mache). Both take a long time to germinate, especially the mache and must do it in a cold soil.

Planting them in the spring is rarely very successful for me.

I covered the bed with protective row cover. In recent years I always use a Remay-type floating row cover, whether it is hot or cold. I get much better results than when leaving the soil bare. It protects seeds and seedlings from heavy rain, unseasonable cold, blazing sun, insects, etc. When I went out and looked at the November-planted bed during our bitter, single digit cold in early January, I despaired. Everything looked dead, but it was not. As I write this in late January with the temperature well above freezing, I have healthy plants of





both. The seedling spinach is ready to provide leaves for salad as is the mache. The arugula and lettuces planted from seeds at the same time are not quite so far along, but coming nicely.

Mid-Winter Planting: Mid-winter planting is just as easy and successful. In late January, the days are getting longer fast. We

will have ten and a half hours of sunlight by February 1, and eleven and a half by the end of the month. This is plenty of sunlight to germinate and grow crops, and we should take advantage of it. There are always a few lovely, warm days in mid-February. The ground certainly can be worked then, so plant. Last year during a warm period, I planted quite a few seeds on February 20: spinach, lettuce, beets, and arugula. I planted the seeds as usual and used row cover. The next week we had several mornings in the low twenties. But on March 5, two weeks later, everything was up and looking healthy. I had the best spring garden yet! My only mistake was that I did plant more. Later plantings in mid-March did not do nearly as well. The beets and spinach were especially successful. I think they are the most sensitive to hot weather.



Editor's Note: We end this Winter issue of *Can You Dig It* with a beautiful article and floral arrangement by Samantha McCall in which she shares an adventure she had with her children and shows us an example of why Floral Design is truly an art form!

Oh, the Joys of "Floraging"

✿ **Samantha McCall**

On a recent unseasonably warm January afternoon, my family and I went for a nature hike along the northern edges of the Choptank River. When I saw the temperatures dance in the 50s, I decided to seize the moment by loading up my screen-addicted family members and invited (forced) them to spend some time communing with the great outdoors.

Thrilled they were not. However, ten minutes into our hike, my 10 year-old daughter, who was happily leading the pack, turned around to me and said "You know, Mom, I didn't want to come on this hike but as soon as I was in nature, I started to feel happier." I KID YOU NOT. My mission was accomplished in only 10 minutes. Anything after that was going to be icing on the cake.

While my two children ran up and down the rocky edges of the trail and even splashed in the water along the sandy beach, my husband and I took comfort in their joy as we amiably strolled aside tall grasses, cedar trees, vines and leafless trees.

The trail took a turn from coastal to forest and it was then that I noticed the forest floor. Because it was winter, much of the deciduous overgrowth was dead and the inner world of this

habitat was unusually opened and revealed. Broken branches, fallen limbs, pine cones, pods and other botanical bits and bobs were in plain sight, as if nature was inviting me to take some.

So, I did what every good floral designer does. I accepted.

A beachcomber at heart, my mind instantly switched gears from "pleasant hike" to "floraging opportunity." My creative brain took over and looked below my feet at the decaying debris, which to my eyes looked like diamonds glistening on a sandy beach, and I started wondering how I could use these random pieces in future designs.

By the time I got back to the car, my arms were loaded with bark, cones, pods and lichen, among other things, and the certainty that my haul would be reincarnated in a new life as objects of nature's beauty.

I was most excited about a 16-inch piece of hollow bark, nearly intact, and that piece is the base for this European-inspired spring design. The budding branches, eggshells, and colorful blooms all hint at the season of renewal and rebirth.

The first step to make this was to adhere the bark with my hot glue gun to a lone cement tile because the fragile arrangement was going to need

support. The bark "shell" actually had a fissure running down the middle so I left that piece open on top so I could access the cavity.

Then I created a grid, gluing four small plastic cups evenly spaced inside the body of the bark. In between the cups, I inserted paperwhite bulbs (the roots add so much texture) that I had, on a whim, fished from the compost.

Next, I poked a dime-sized hole in the bottom of the egg shells and placed them on top of each water-filled cup which became a natural armature to support the flowers.

From that point, with the bones of the design set, the rest was embellishing, one layer at a time. Moss, princess pine, fungi, pine straw and small branches with buds (these in particular came from a Bradford pear branch that had fallen at the bank) filled in the empty space.



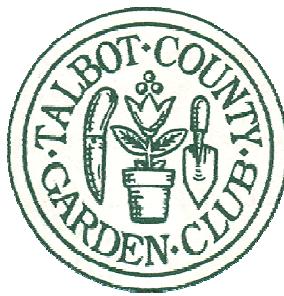
The last step was very carefully arranging the blooms in the eggshells to look as if they were growing out of the eggs.

Like the collective elements of the design itself, the base for this piece can be re-used again and again. All it needs is some fresh flowers and maybe a little fluffing.

I encourage you to give it a try yourself. The time spent in nature is always a good investment as is the time spent creating. As always, feel free to improvise and create as your spirit calls.



MATERIALS	TOOLS
Tree bark	Glue gun
Moss	Clippers
Egg shells	Plastic shot-glass size cups
Branches	Board, tray or tile
5 ranunculus plus buds	
4 tips of stock	
6 freesia	
Bulbs	
Fungi	
Pine straw	
Princess pine	



TALBOT COUNTY GARDEN CLUB

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