

# **GARDENING TIPS FOR BOSTON.COM**

**By Sharon Soltzberg**

## **JANUARY**

Get out your notes about what grew well and tasted good in your garden last year. As plant catalogs start arriving, it's fun to research and plan for next year's garden. Keep in mind that the catalogs sometimes exaggerate in pictures and text. If a catalog doesn't give scientific names and accurate information about cold hardiness zones (for perennials and woody plants), don't order from it because you won't know exactly what plant you will be getting and if it will survive the winter in our area.

Check out the reliable information about which vegetables do well in our area and other valuable information from the Massachusetts extension service in Amherst, MA, at [www.umassextension.org](http://www.umassextension.org).

When preparing a plan for this year's vegetable garden, practice crop rotation, which means that you rearrange where you put various crops so that they are not always grown in the same area of the garden. Crop rotation helps prevent diseases and insects in the soil that are specific to a certain kind or family of plant from attacking year after year.

There are many gardening websites where you can learn about plant cultivars that do well in our climate, are more disease and insect resistant, and have other desirable qualities. You can also find information about placing each plant in an environment where it will thrive (for instance, wet or dry, sunny or shady). Just do a Google search on the name of the plant (use the scientific name if you have it).

## **FEBRUARY**

A successful vegetable garden greatly depends on locating it in the right spot. The ideal site for a vegetable garden would receive a minimum of six hours of full sun each day, and eight to ten hours would be even better. The soil should be a loose, well-drained loam (not too sandy or clayey) with plenty of organic matter; but if you don't have that, you can always improve

your soil by adding organic matter such as compost. Perfectly level ground isn't absolutely necessary, but it decreases the chance of soil erosion and makes it a little easier to work.

Consider integrating some edible plants into your ornamental gardens. Plants that provide people food and also have ornamental value include sour cherry trees, pear trees, apple trees, low and highbush blueberries (great fall color), grapevines, and elderberries; herbs such as hardy English lavender, winter savory, sage, parsley, thymes, and alliums (such as chives, garlic chives, and garlic); and veggies such as scarlet runner beans, lettuce with different colors of foliage, beets, and swiss chard. The fruit of pear and apple trees might not be much to look at without spraying with pesticides, but the unsprayed fruit can be used in sauces, preserves, and pies; and the spring flowers are beautiful.

## **MARCH**

To rid a vegetable plot of weeds, after the weed seeds have germinated and you can see the weed seedlings, cover the whole area with an opaque plastic tarp for about a month to kill the weeds. If you do this later in Spring, a clear plastic tarp will let in sun and raise the temperature under the plastic so high that the weeds will be cooked.

Get some pruning done now when you can see the branches clearly without the presence of leaves. As part of routine pruning, you can cut branches for "forcing" (stimulating to flower early by simply putting branches in a container of water and changing the water occasionally). Look for the swollen buds on early bloomers such as forsythia, which can sometimes be forced as early as January, cherry, crab apple, flowering dogwood, and flowering quince.

Enjoy the flowers of early bulbs such as snowdrops and species crocuses that you planted last autumn.