

# December's Garden Checklist

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



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**PHOTO CREDIT:** William M. Johnson

**There is always something to harvest in Upper Gulf Coast gardens including the winter season. Home citrus growers are harvesting a bounty of tasty citrus.**

I have griped too much about the reluctance of the fall season to make a sustained presence. Fall weather finally arrived in the Texas Upper Gulf Coast over the past weekend. It's about time as the winter season will officially start in about 3 weeks!

Typical gardening activities taper off at this time of year. Weather conditions over the last month of the year will likely provide something for everyone to like—be it pleasantly warm days or crisply

cool days. The generous rounds of rainfall over the weekend will help ensure vigorous growth of cool season vegetables in the garden.

Although the winter season starts on Wednesday, December 21, at 3:02 a.m., some home gardeners are already harvesting broccoli and a variety of greens.

The month of December ushers in a state of dormancy for many landscape trees and shrubs. What is good for plants is oftentimes

good for the gardener. The month of December offers something for every gardener to do and even enjoy. Review the following gardening checklist for December for gardening reminders and educational programs:

**MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER ONLINE:** The Galveston County Master Gardener newsletter is crammed full of useful information on Gulf Coast gardening ranging from commonly found insect pests in the garden to Master Gardeners





listing their favorite landscape and vegetable plants. The November/December newsletter issue is available online (<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>).

**TILL GARDEN BEDS:** Unlike our gardening friends above the Mason-Dixon Line, our soils don't freeze solid so we can work the garden soil and prepare beds for next spring's planting activities. When working garden soil, whether for planting flowers and shrubs or a vegetable garden, never till or work the soil when it is wet, especially soil with high clay content. Tilling wet soil tends to degrade soil structure, forming large clods that may take a long time to break down. Soil works up best when it is slightly moist, yet crumbles readily after being hand-pressed into a ball.

**CONTROL OF COOL SEASON WEEDS:** Yes, weeds do continue to grow during the winter season. Do not let these unwanted bullies take over your flower beds. A 3-to-4 inch layer of mulch will prevent most cool season weed seeds from sprouting. It is more effective to keep weeds under control with regular efforts than to try to correct a situation that has gotten out of control.

**POINSETTIAS:** Christmas poinsettias are widely available now. Keep the potting soil evenly moist, never let the soil dry out or become soggy for long periods.

Poinsettias are often purchased with decorative foil wraps that do not allow water drainage. Be sure to take your poinsettia out of these types of decorative pots before watering. Water your poinsettia whenever the surface of the soil appears dry and the plant feels light when you lift it.

The best way to water a poinsettia is to place it in a sink and add water until it begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot. Keep the plant in the sink until all excess water has drained out of the pot and then place it back into its ornamental container.

If your poinsettia is sitting in a container with a saucer underneath, pour out any extra water the saucer captures after watering.

**TRANSPLANT TREES AND SHRUBS:** December through February is an excellent time to transplant trees and shrubs. Transplanting during the winter season allows the root system of transplants to become better established prior to spring growth and summer heat. This significantly reduces plant stress during the following summer.

**DETERMINING RIPENESS OF CITRUS:** Keep in mind that all citrus fruits only ripen on the tree. The best way to determine ripeness for oranges is to watch for the color to change to orange, then check for a slight softening of the fruit. Sometimes an opaque sheen will develop on the skin. Lemons are ready when yellow, and generally

hold on the tree for months. Limes are smaller and ready when green; again, watch for a slight softening. Clip ripe fruit off with pruning shears instead of pulling it to avoid damage to twigs.

You usually can't tell if citrus is ripe by looking at it. When some of the fruit reach full size, taste them to see if they're ripe. Tasting them is the only way to know whether or not they are ready to be eaten. Try one and find out!

