

The week ahead

TUESDAY
HEALTHY LIVING
HEALTH-CARE BARGAINS: Tips to help trim your medical expenses in the new year

WEDNESDAY
TASTE
TEXAN CHRISTMAS: We've put together a menu from deep in the heart of the Hill Country

FRIDAY
HOME
LIGHTED WONDERLAND: She blows transformers with her holiday display, but her neighbors love her.

Today on dallasnews.com

Dallas Design Guide
 Blog: Home has teamed up with Design*Sponge to create an extensive guide to Dallas style. Take a look and post your comments.
shoppingblog.dallasnews.com

Christmas breakfast
 Recipe database: We have a dozen recipes to make Christmas breakfast memorable. Many are make-ahead dishes.
dallasnews.com/holidayrecipes



Holiday guide
 Online: Don't let the holidays stress you out! We have advice on entertaining and gift selection, and even guides on how much to tip and how to avoid family fights.
dallasnews.com/holidays

HOME

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Allspice needs male, female to fruit

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
home@dallasnews.com

Last year, I bought an allspice tree (*Pimenta dioica*). It seems to be doing well in its pot, but it hasn't flowered. Is allspice dioecious, so that I need to know whether I have a male or a female plant?

J.W. Dallas

Yes, allspice is dioecious, so both male and female plants must be present for fruit to develop. It's a terrific herb, but it must be protected here during winter. For details about the plant, see my *Herbs for Texas* book.

A hedge in front of my house has grown too tall and too deep, front to back. The hedge needs to be about 2 feet tall and 2 feet deep but is about 3 by 3. The hedge is about half yaupon and half some type of larger-leaved holly. I would like to prune it drastically, but I'm afraid of killing the plants. When is the best time to prune hollies in such a way, and how much can I cut?

A.M., Dallas

The best time to prune would be late winter just before the buds for new growth start to swell. Pick-prune as much as you can and try to leave as much foliage as possible. Shrubs can live if cut back to bare stems, but the resulting stress can cause long-term damage.

Use my Sick Tree Treatment and one of the Nature's Creation compost products that contain mycorrhizal fungi. Do this prep work now, before pruning, so that root development will be stimulated over the winter.

I can relate to R.J. in Canton, who wrote to you about his son dealing with mites. We have had a similar problem. I am convinced that these are Texas mites and not sinister foreign invaders. We discovered that dry soil is the source of our mites. When we walk outside, they attach themselves to clothing, socks, shoes, etc. We use natural insecticidal soap diluted with water through a garden hose bottle attachment, and we spray the lawn regularly. When I garden or do lawn work, I leave my shoes outside the door before entering the house, and I change my clothes and socks immediately. I cannot stress these techniques enough! These critters will have a feast at night in your bed. Change bed linens frequently. Mites can multiply in the crevices of wood floors, too, so frequent vacuuming is essential. It is hard to stay ahead of these bugs, and pets also may bring them inside.

C.A., Plano

Thanks for the report and tips. Be aware, however, that spraying a pesticide regularly, even an organic one such as insecticidal soap, can kill beneficial microorganisms.

RESOURCES

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts
RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com
MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

Get tools ready for winter

CHORES

By RICK ROSEN
 Staff Writer
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Cleaning tools and lawn equipment and properly storing them for the winter will get gardening off to a good start in spring.

Here are tips from gardening experts for keeping your tools in good shape.

Lawn mowers, edgers and tillers

Run the engines until they are out of gasoline. Old gas can become gummy if it sits in the fuel tank all winter. Leave the fuel tank empty until spring. Drain the oil tank and refill it with fresh oil. Check the undercarriage for matted grass or dirt. Clean it now so you won't have to in spring.

Sharpen the blade of your rotary mower. If you don't have the proper equipment, or if you're worried about damaging the blade, take it to a lawn-mower shop. But most homeowners can learn how to do it. Here are the steps:

1. Turn the mower upside down.
2. Clamp a piece of wood to the inside of the mower's deck to keep the blade from turning as you remove it with a socket wrench (turn the blade bolt counterclockwise to remove). If the bolt won't turn, oil it, wait 15 minutes, then try again.
3. Secure the blade in a bench vise or with a similar tool. Sharpen blades with a 10-inch bastard mill file, using smooth, quick swipes away from your body, going from the center of the blade to the ends. The goal is to keep the original angle of the blade.
4. If necessary, dip the blade in cold water periodically so the steel doesn't get too soft.
5. After filing, test for balance. Place the center hole of the blade on your fingertip or on a screwdriver. If it balances, great; if not, the heavier side needs more work.

Other tips from the pros: Don't sharpen cracked blades; replace them. And, using a grinding wheel is easier than using a file.

Digging tools

1. Scrub or rinse off any dirt.
2. Working outdoors, take a rag and apply a solution of half turpentine and half boiled linseed oil (both available at hardware stores) to wooden handles. Keep the solution on for 30 minutes, then wipe it dry. Doing so keeps the handle from cracking or drying out.
3. Remove any rust from blades with coarse steel wool, sandpaper or a stiff wire brush. Use a clamp to hold the tool in place.
4. To prevent rust, plunge the metal part of the tools into a large bucket of sand mixed with a quart of oil. Store them this way.

Shears and pruners

Sharpen the blades. A flat-edged file works well.

Sources: About.com, Texas Cooperative Extension



Store digging tools in a bucket of oily sand over the winter to keep them free of rust.

NORTH HAVEN Gardens

Celebrate the holidays in beautiful living color!

Fabulous selection of fresh cut, healthy Christmas Trees! Fresh garland and wreaths create a festive holiday home. Add color with fragrant Rosemary Topiaries, Poinsettias and live mini trees to make your holidays extra special.

For seasonal color add Pansies, Violas, and Cyclamen to your garden!

Special Holiday Shopping Hours:
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Advertisement

Shopping the town

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Personal care items and accessories

Don't forget that special woman in your life this Christmas. Barklee Ltd. is offering a 20% savings on all vanity trays, mirrors, accessories and personal care items. Featuring Lady Primrose, Niven Morgan, Rance and McBlooms. Also save 20% on all Simple Pleasures Nightwear. Don't forget our Christmas décor is 35% off! Shop now and check every woman off your Christmas list!

Barklee Ltd., Preston Park Village, suite 321, Plano. 972-612-1935. Mon. - Fri. 10-6, Sat. - 10-5.

Wonderful winter white

Nancy Mostert is showing elephant ivory jewelry from the 1870s - 1970s. The collection includes an exquisite Victorian cameo, "flower" bracelet and a delicate ivory cross from France. Nancy's shop is located in **Forestwood Antique Mall**, 5333 Forest Lane, Dallas. Open daily from 10 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. 972-661-0001.

It's just in 'Thyme'

SampleHouse & CandleShop has its Fraser Fir items from Thyme on sale. Reg. \$25.95 - \$60, on sale 20% off. Friday, Dec. 14 through Thursday, Dec. 20.

☞ We would like to express our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Pat Brown. Pat passed away Sunday, Dec. 9 after a long battle with cancer. Pat's many years of devoted service will be remembered by all of us here. As many of you know, Pat was the creative producer of our blooming plant arrangements and she will be deeply missed. ☞ **SampleHouse & Candle-shop**, Dallas, Highland Park, Plano, Frisco and Southlake. www.samplehouseonline.com.

Rutherford's December sale

The annual December sale is under way. This is a store you should see and enjoy! All in-stock fabrics, trimmings, furnishings, paintings, rugs, antiques, lamps, gifts and chandeliers are 25% off storewide. Wall art, toys and music boxes also are available at 25% off. New items are arriving daily.

Rutherford's, 5417 West Lovers Lane, Dallas. 214-357-0838. www.rutherforddesign.com.

Dress up your table

Dishes from the Past has gone all out with hundreds of pieces of Spode Woodland, Christmas Tree and Christmas Tree Grove — and it's all 30% off. Gifts galore — tureens for centerpieces, colored crystal for an added pop on your table — it all awaits you.

Royal Doulton Floradora Green, Lenox Brookdale and Haviland Poppy are among replacement stock, along with new and current patterns.

Dishes from the Past — 3701 Lovell in Fort Worth, 817-737-6390 and 1-800-984-8801. Open 10 - 5, Mon. To Sat. www.dishesfromthepast.com.

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celebrating 55 years of success!

Shopping the Town runs every Friday in the Home section.

To advertise, contact your Dallas Morning News account representative or Denise Sanders at 214-977-2044.

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