

The week ahead

TUESDAY HEALTHY LIVING

DO IT JOYFULLY:
Time to unwrap
the final
Healthy Virtue

WEDNESDAY TASTE

WINE PANEL:
Our professional
tasters pick
inexpensive
sparkling wines
for
New Year's Eve

NEXT WEEK HOME

**GOOD TO
BE GREEN:**
A doctor's home
in Maypearl takes
advantage of the
land's benefits
but keeps the
environment
intact

Today on dallasnews.com

How can we help?

Tell us: Newcomers, have you moved to the Dallas area recently? If so, tell us what you struggled with. What are you still looking for? Tell us what kind of information you need.

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HOME

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Ways to give lawns a winter boost

Would spraying compost tea or other organic liquids (such as seaweed or molasses) during the winter help to give grass or soil a head start in the spring?

J.W., Whitesboro

Yes, a drench of any of those materials or Garrett Juice will help. Mycorrhizal fungi products such as those from Nature's Creation may work even better.

In a recent column, you seemed to indicate that deep-root feeding of trees is not a good investment, regardless of the tree's age. My trees are older and in good health, but I don't want to waste money continuing to deep-root feed if there is little benefit. What do you suggest as an alternative?

H.D., Dallas

The answer is shallow-root feeding. Most of a tree's important roots are in the top 6 inches of soil. Injecting fertilizer deeper than that misses the roots and wastes money.

I recommend my Sick Tree Treatment. Aerate the soil before this procedure is beneficial, and the aeration holes are just 4 to 6 inches deep. (See Resources for instructions.)

I bought Mexican bird of paradise plants in Arizona during a summer trip. I potted them upon my return to Texas. They are in large containers, and I moved them indoors when cool weather arrived. The leaves are turning brown and dropping after several weeks inside. I am watering the plants every other week, and I put them in front of a south-facing window for sunlight.

D.E., Tioga

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
home@dallasnews.com

Make sure the soil isn't too wet or too dry. Add enough whole-ground cornmeal to cover the soil with a yellow powder and gently work it into the soil.

If there's enough constant light, these tropical plants should live until spring, when you can put them outdoors again.

Our 160-pound St. Bernard is pulling off pieces of the hard plastic sides of our freestanding spa. We think she is looking for something inside the spa structure, but nothing has been found. She appears to continue tearing it up out of habit. Is there something we can spray on the outside of the spa to keep her from destroying it?

M.I., Arlington

Really hot-flavored sprays sometimes work. Mix Tabasco pepper sauce in water, or purée a much hotter pepper such as a habanero and mix it with water.

What works even better at times is to spray the area with manure tea made by soaking some of the dog's feces in water. There is an odor at first, obviously.

Both of these solutions will wear off and must be redone from time to time. The schedule

depends on the weather.

You also could install an electric-wire pet fence. After the dog's nose hits it once, the dog will learn to stay away.

I live near the Bosque River. The soil at my house is not very deep, and limestone is beneath it. Will pecan trees grow in that kind of soil? I have many red oaks and live oaks around my house.

J.H., Crawford

Pecans would like deeper soil, but they should do as well as the oaks are doing. Plant the trees high and build the surrounding soil up to the base of the root flares.

We have a 1-acre lake that contains perch and bass. Cattails growing around the lake have gotten out of control. We sprayed them with an herbicide designed to kill cattails. Can we burn off the dead stuff, or will that hurt the fish? I also would like to know an organic way to control cattails.

E.F., Berclair, Texas

The chemicals in the weed killer will hurt the fish. Next time, excavate soil around the edge of the lake to increase the water depth so that cattails won't grow there.

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

CHORES



W. Atlee Burpee & Co.

If a frost threatens, a floating row cover can be used to raise the ambient temperature about 5 degrees.

Help tender plants survive a freeze

By RICK ROSEN
Staff Writer
rrosen@dallasnews.com

When a freeze is forecast, tender plants are at risk. Even hardy plants can die in unusually hard freezes. But simple steps beforehand can help protect your garden from harm.

Dale Groom, horticulturist for the Texas Cooperative Extension in Dallas County, says the best protection is heavy mulch — "several inches of bark mulch, pine mulch or clean hay," he says. Piling mulch around plants moderates the soil temperature.

Another tip: Water plants before a hard, dry freeze. A dry freeze can suck moisture from plants, says Mr. Groom, especially evergreens, a group that includes Arizona cypress, cedar, juniper and ligustrum.

Azalea, boxwood, oleander, pyracantha, pittosporum, fig, crape myrtle and hibiscus also are susceptible to freezes.

Laying old sheets or blankets over plants is a good way to protect them from freezes. Don't wet down the sheets.

Some gardeners lay sheets of plastic over plants. However, Mr. Groom says this doesn't work well, because the cold goes

right through plastic. In addition, leaves can freeze to the plastic. If you do use it, be sure to use some sort of framework to keep the plastic off the plants.

Floating row covers (or sheets of frost cloth) are useful when a frost threatens. Floating row covers are like lightweight sheets that sit on the plants or on wire hoops. Weigh down the edges of the fabric with rocks or mulch so wind won't blow the covers away.

Mr. Groom says they can provide about 5 degrees of temperature protection.

The best way to prevent freeze damage, according to Mr. Groom: Plant winter-hardy species. We asked other longtime gardeners their methods for protecting plants. Their tips:

■ John Hunt, a member of the First Men's Garden Club of Dallas, covers plants with old sheets, towels or, if rain isn't forecast, cardboard boxes. He covers his Sago palms with towels, then a plastic garbage can. "That works well for even longer periods of subfreezing temps," he says.

■ Bill Hopkins, a member of the Native Plant Society of Texas, covers small, tender plants with 5-gallon plastic buckets, weighing each down with a rock.

■ Gregory Rohde, owner of Rohde's Nursery and Nature Store in Garland, recommends applying kelp that contains the algae *Ascophyllum nodosum* to help plants with moisture intake during sudden cold spells.

For more tips, go to dallasnews.com/home.

Advertisement



Tyler jar candle sale

Our Tyler jar candles are on sale Friday, Dec. 21 through Monday, Dec. 31. Great last minute gifts. Reg. \$13.50 each. Sale price 3/\$33. Over 24 scents to choose from. **Samplehouse & Candle-shop**, Dallas, Highland Park, Plano, Frisco and Southlake. Our Christmas sale starts Monday, Dec. 24, 50% off selected items. www.samplehouseonline.com.

Shopping the town

A holiday tradition for 55 years



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, including unique serving ware. **Rutherford's**, 5417 West Lovers Lane, Dallas. 214-357-0888. www.rutherforddesign.com.



Santa Baby

Travel Jewelry Precious Gems will be open from noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 23. We would like to wish all a happy and safe holiday. Cheers! **Travel Jewelry**, 6123 Berkshire Lane in Preston Center, 214-369-4722.



Maddox Shop sale

All winter robes, bed jackets, brush back satin gowns, PJs, flannel gowns, all Karen Neuberger gowns & PJs, pantsuits, jackets and Dearfoam slipper boots are on sale. Don't forget the Maddox Shop for your strapless bras for dressy holiday parties! **The Maddox Shop**, 130 Casa Linda Plaza, 214-328-3009.



Holiday elegance

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