

LOOKING AHEAD: SPRINGTIME THOUGHTS

By Joan Hauser

Despite every indication to the contrary, it **is** the middle of the winter. Ice and snow are bound to appear before long. That's when it's a good time to curl up in your favorite chair, plop all the spring catalogs next to you, and begin thinking about your spring garden. Even if you don't always follow through by the time spring comes around, it's better than shovelling the walk or bundling up to go outside.

Here are a few tried and true garden tips culled from many sources:



Willows Do The Trick

An old time trick was used by estate gardeners of the past. They took a young willow cutting or two and added it to the water when rooting cuttings. Sometimes, they mashed them up to create a thick fluid. Experience had shown them that willows secrete a hormone primed to enhance rooting. Here's a more modern tip--when you are far afield collecting cuttings, bring along a sealable plastic bag. Blow it up, add the cuttings, and seal. Do not add water. Plants thus protected may survive for as long as two weeks.

Make Vines Vanish

To remove unwanted vines on trees, cut them around the tree base approximately 12 inches above the ground. Later, in March, give each vine a sharp tug and pull it down. Bag the remains. Then spray any newly sprouting leaves on the bottom of the trunk with a weed killer. For other, smaller jobs, here's a way to carry around a small amount of weed killer. Wash an empty roll-on container and fill it with the weed killer. Simply dab onto the offending leaves as you encounter them.



Kitchen Stuff

In season, save the water after you boil or steam vegetables to add nutrients as you pour it on your patio plants. Even if you don't have a compost pile, keep your banana skins to set at the base of roses when you plant them. Cold tea or loose tea leaves can also be put on the roots. Add 2 ounces of epsom salts to 2 gallons of water to drench and wake up listless plants. A border of crushed eggshells set around plants will add nutrients and stop snails and slugs. In early spring, when the ground is too cold for planting, add several pots of boiling water to already dug holes to warm up the soil.

Bouquets Galore

Re-invigorate your cut flowers by adding nutrients. If you don't have those little packets the florists give away, create your own. Here are a three different suggestions: add a sugar lump and an occasional aspirin; add one part of 7-Up to 2 parts of water; add 3 tablespoons to the water--one of sugar, one of vinegar, and one of clorox. Always re-cut flower stems at a 45 degree angle as you arrange them, making sure to remove all leaves below the water line. I usually set an old saucer or decorative plate in a complimentary color under vases when I put them the table. That way, I don't have to worry about spill-over.



At The Grocery Store



Grow Your Own Pineapples

Add to your indoor garden by cultivating fruits and vegetables from the grocery store. One of the easiest is a pineapple. Twist off the crown (the top part). Carefully slice the bottom of the crown horizontally until the small dots, or root buds are visible. Remove the lower leaves and let the crown dry for a couple of days. Then place the crown in a clear glass vase or jar and put it somewhere far from temperature extremes. You'll see healthy root growth in about 3 weeks. When you do, you're ready to plant the crown in a mixture of potting soil and perlite. In about two months, your new plant will *take*. To be sure, gently tug to see if there is resistance from the roots. Keep soil slightly moist. It takes a long time to actually grow baby pineapples, but you can enjoy your new exotic plant as it matures.

A Mere Pittance

Suspend a washed avocado pit over a glass of water with toothpicks. Leave it suspended, pointy side up, for about 3 months, changing the water as necessary. Once you have a 7 to 8 inch tall trunk growing from the top pot your new plant, and watch it grow! Cover the pit halfway with moist, loose soil. When the plant reaches 12 inches, pinch out the top leaves.





Sweets To The Sweet

Suspend sweet potatoes in jars full of water, submerging about 1/3 of the potato in the water. Use toothpicks if necessary to keep the potato from sinking all the way into the water. When the sprouts are about 6" to 8" long, snap them off and stick them in another jar of water. After these grow roots, they can be planted and set outside in April for your vegetable garden. Make sure the soil is loose and uncompacted. Sprouts remaining on the potatoes will continue to grow and create vines to embellish your counters and windows.

Odds & Ends

Mark Your Plants

Instead of buying expensive plant markers to insert in the ground, create your own plant labels, using old mini-blinds, plastic picnic knives, or small rocks. Write plant names with an indelible pen.

"Antique" Your Garden Ornaments

Make your garden pots and statues look ancient by coating them thickly with natural flavored yogurt. Within a week or two, they will be covered with a mossy lichen.

Pot Prep

Line your terracotta pots with with several layers of wet newspaper or a coffee filter. Used tea bags can be substituted for plant shards at the bottom of the pot.

Create an Illusion

To make a small garden appear bigger, plant hot colors, such as reds, oranges, and yellows closer to the house and cool colors, such as blues, grays, and mauves farther away. To create an enticing vista, add an old mirror, angled to provide a long view.

FEBRUARY REMINDERS

Bring branches of early flowering shrubs indoors for forcing.

Prune overgrown summer flowering shrubs.

Sow seeds of beets, celery, lettuce, and leeks indoors.

Take heart. Spring is coming!!