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**CLEVELAND COUNTY  
EXTENSION**

January 2021

# THE NEW HORT THYMES

Serving Cleveland County with the most up to date gardening, lawn, landscaping, and horticulture information.



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## A Resolution to Improve Your Garden

As the pandemic began last year, many people took up gardening for the first time. Concerns about food supply lead to seed suppliers running out of stock. As a horticulturalist, it was exciting to see the new gardens pop up on social media.

If last year was your first year to take on a garden, consider having a new year's resolution to improve this year! There are many things that can be done now to plan for success later. Consider researching good varieties for our area. Plan out how much of certain vegetables you want to grow. Get a soil test to know what all amendments should be made. Also, check out our [fact sheet website](#). There are hundreds of gardening related fact sheets. Everything from vegetable production to composting

to pollinators to xeriscaping. There's always something new to learn from our fact sheets.

## 2020 Webinars

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# Know Your Macros

With a new year comes new goals. This year, consider familiarizing yourself with your macros. No, this isn't another call for a new diet or eating strategy. I'm talking about the macro elements in the soil - nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K). When purchasing a bag fertilizer, there should always be three numbers on the bag. These are a ratio of the macro elements in the fertilizer, represented as N-P-K. But what do these macro elements do?



## Nitrogen (N)

Nitrogen is the most frequently used element in plant growth and is required for leafy green growth. It also helps with rapid and continuous growth of the plant. Nitrogen is mobile in the soil, making it prone to leaching. It is best to add nitrogen right before planting so that it is readily available. Crops that are harvested for their foliage, like lettuce and spinach, benefit from frequent additions of nitrogen.

## Phosphorus (P)

Phosphorus is an important nutrient in the development of flowers and roots. Plants do not use it as frequently as nitrogen, so repeat applications are not usually needed. If nitrogen is the gas that drives the car, then phosphorus is the oil. It's still important, but not as frequently used. Phosphorus is immobile in the soil. Once it is added, it takes longer for it to move. If too much is added to the soil, it can become excessive. Excessive phosphorus ties up other micronutrients and inhibits beneficial microbes in the soil.

## Potassium (K)

Potassium is similar in nature to phosphorus. It is immobile in the soil and not used as frequently as nitrogen. If potassium is deficient in the soil, one pre-plant application is often sufficient. Potassium plays a crucial role in the plant's immune system. Plants that have adequate amounts of potassium are able to defend themselves against diseases and are better at withstanding environmental stresses.

## Soil Testing

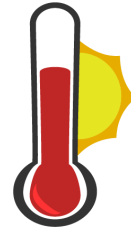
Wondering what fertilizers to use and how to meet your macros? Get a soil test! A routine soil test from your local county extension office will show current amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, along with the pH level. An extension educator will also provide a tailored fertilizer program (conventional or organic), so you know what to buy and how much to apply. The cost is \$10 and it takes about two to three weeks to get results. If you're looking to put in a cool-season spring garden, now is the time to get your soil tested! For more information on soil testing, [click here](#).

# Caring for Indoor Plants

Houseplants have become popular in recent years, but for good reasons. They're pretty easy to grow and propagate. They add aesthetics to our homes and offices while increasing the oxygen within our space. There has even been some research to show that they can increase productivity. Winter is an especially satisfying time to have indoor plants when gardening tasks outside may be limited. While houseplants are fairly easy to grow, most are native to tropic environments. Mimicking this environment in the home is a good strategy to be successful with houseplants.

## Temperature

Temperature plays a key role in plant health. When growing houseplants, a good rule of thumb is to keep temperatures between 65°F and 75°F during the day. Lower the temperatures at night. It is important to always keep temperatures above 50°F. Warm and cold temperature drafts should be avoided, so make sure to keep plants away from doors, windows, fireplaces, and furnace vents.



## Humidity

Humidity is the representation of water vapor in the air. Plants prefer a relative humidity of around 40%. People tend to prefer 10-20% relative humidity. Create microclimates with higher humidity throughout the home to satisfy plant requirements. Group plants together, place them a tray or moist pebbles, or use terrariums to create humidity pockets.



## Light

Light can be a major limiting factor when growing plants indoors. Plants have different light requirements, so match plants with rooms that have sufficient light. A south facing window is going to have the most light, especially in winter. Flowering houseplants will require more light than foliage houseplants. Grow lights are available, but are often not needed unless growing something more high maintenance.



## Soil

There shouldn't actually be any real soil used in indoor containers. Garden soil is too heavy and will not properly drain. It is best to use a commercial potting mix or growing medium from the local garden center. It must be well-drained and well-aerated to support plants in containers. If growing some like a cactus or an orchid, there are specific potting mix blends that can be purchased.



## Water

Houseplants die more often from overwatering than underwatering. It is important to water only when dry. Check the plant by gently lifting it. If it is lightweight, then it may be time for watering. Water until it drains from the bottom. Hanging baskets should be watered more often. Plants in winter time do not require as much watering.



## January Plant of the Month

### Spider Plant

A prolific, easy indoor plant



Spider plant is an excellent choice for aspiring indoor plant enthusiasts. It is low maintenance, tolerant of neglect, and able to thrive in many conditions. It is clump forming with grass-like leaves. The leaves can be solid green or variegated. Also called airplane plant, it gets its name from the small plantlets that are produced on long trailing stems. The plantlets are extremely easy to propagate. Look for plantlets that have developed aerial roots. These can be planted directly into fresh potting soil.

Photo from the University of Wisconsin

## Garden Tips for January

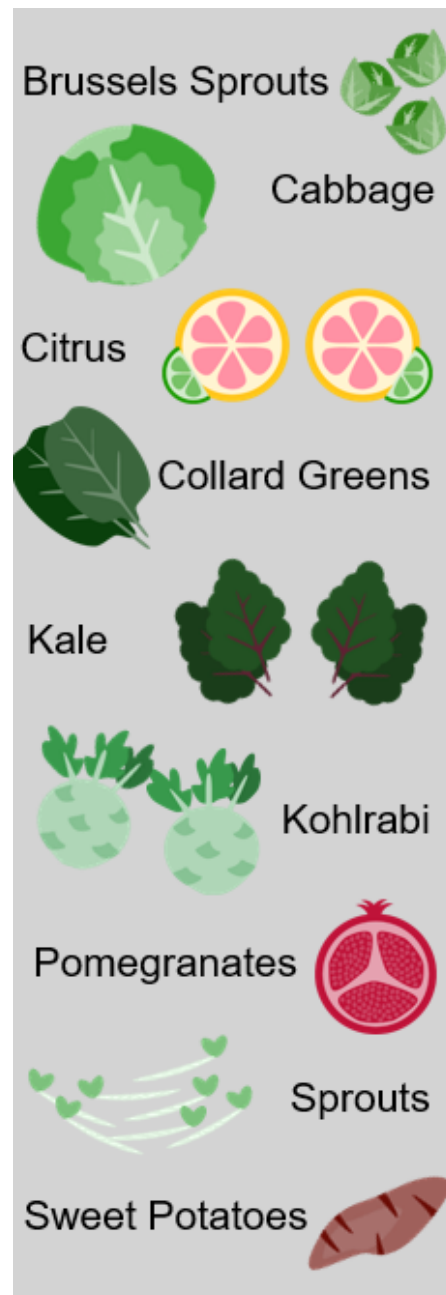
- Keep all plants watered during dry conditions, even if dormant
- Thoroughly water plantings at least 24 hours before a hard-freeze, if the soil is dry
- Remove leaves from cool-season grasses or mow with a mulching mower; this mitigates disease pressure in the upcoming season
- Continue mowing cool-season (fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass) lawns
- Control broadleaf weeds in well-established lawns with a post-emergent herbicide
- Mulch perennials, rose bushes, strawberries, and bulbs, but wait until after several early freezes; otherwise pests will have a place to overwinter
- Gather up fallen leaves, these are a great spot for insects and diseases to overwinter
- Till bare garden plots to expose overwinter pests to the cold environment
- Amend garden areas with compost
- Start planning for next year! Now is a great time to map out your vegetable gardens so you know exactly what seeds to order and where to start in the spring
- Visit your county extension office to obtain gardening fact sheets
- Clean supplies and check equipment for repairs

## Eat Seasonally

In-season produce is fresher, cheaper, more nutritious, and better for the environment. These are some of the seasonal crops for January:



- Order gardening supplies for the upcoming season
- Make structural improvements to the garden and landscape
- Keep bird feeders full and break the ice in the bird baths



## 2020 Webinars on YouTube

Miss any of our 2020 webinars? No worries! We've recorded and uploaded them to our YouTube page. Check out 2020's webinars here.



### The Good, The Bad, and The Bugly

Insects in the garden are a given. If we plant it, they're bound to find it. That being said, not all insects that we find in the garden are bad. Some may be beneficial insects that we want to encourage in our gardens. Join us for this webinar to diagnose insect problems and to learn about the good, the bad, and the ugly of the bug world. [Click here](#) to watch.



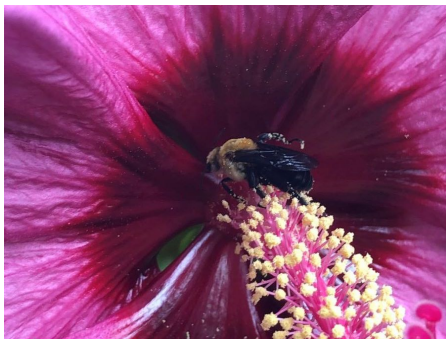
## Talking Trash: Composting in the Garden

Compost is an excellent source of organic matter for garden soil. It can loosen clay soils, help sandy soils retain moisture, and even be used as a mulch. While there are many commercially available sources of compost, it is rewarding to make your own. Backyard composting can also keep yard waste and food scraps out of the landfill. Join us for a webinar to discuss how to get started with backyard composting and turn your trash into gold. [Click here](#) to watch.



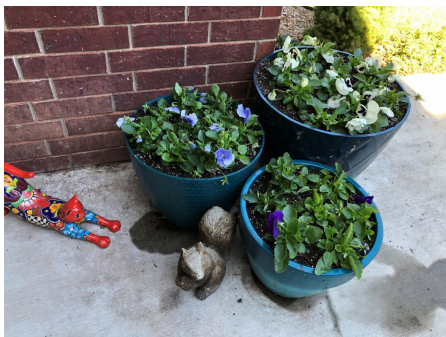
## Fall Gardening

Fall gardens can be started as early as late July. It's difficult to think about fall in the heat of the summer. As the weather cools off, late plantings are perfectly positioned for harvest before the first frost. Join us for a webinar to learn the strategies behind fall gardening and maximize that final harvest. [Click here](#) to watch.



## Protecting Pollinators at Home

Over 90% of all known flowering plants, and almost all fruits and vegetables, require pollination to produce crops. Between honey bee colony collapse disorder and the decline of monarch butterflies, pollinators have become a major interest for home gardeners. Join us for a webinar to discuss creating pollinator friendly gardens and just how important these little critters are to our lives. [Click here](#) to watch.



## Garden Assignments for Autumn

The air is warm, but the breeze is cool. Fall is officially here! Wondering what should be done in the garden during this time of year? Join us to discuss selecting cool season annuals, planting spring flowering bulbs, extending the vegetable garden season, and other autumn assignments. [Click here](#) to watch.