

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

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IN MY GARDEN

Even though the cold and snow have just arrived in their typical North Coast fashion, I am already feeling tired of winter. It seems unthinkable that only a few months ago the trees were still full of leaves, the sun was still warm, and there were still flowers in the garden. My favorite way to recapture the sights and scents of the garden is to visit indoor gardens, greenhouses and plant shows.

Get in the mood for Valentine's Day by learning more about the most romantic of flowers: the orchid. [Holden Arboretum's](#) WinterBlooms Orchid Show and Sale concludes this weekend on Sunday, February 4th. Experts on orchids and other house plants will be on hand to answer your questions. An indoor serenity garden created for the show displays various orchids in an Asian garden setting.

If you love getting out in the winter weather, visit Holden Arboretum on Saturday the 3rd for WinterFest, featuring bird watching hikes, snowshoe lessons, an ice carving competition and more. The Holden Arboretum is at 9500 Sperry Road, Kirtland, Ohio.

Saturday February 17th is Orchid Day at [Petitti Garden Centers](#) in Strongsville, Oakwood Village and Tallmadge, Ohio. Free orchid growing seminars will be presented at 10:30 am and 2:00 pm at each location by the Greater Akron Orchid

Society. Cookies and refreshments are provided, and one registrant at each location will win an orchid plant.



Happy Valentines Day

The 64th Annual [Home and Garden Show](#) runs February 3rd through the 11th at the IX Center in Cleveland, Ohio. With three full-sized landscaped and decorated model homes and over 150,000 square feet of gardens, you are sure to be inspired. This year's themes are The Beauty of Ireland and The Green Building Movement. One attendee will win a grand prize trip for two to Ireland. Admission includes a free one-year subscription to This Old House Magazine, which can be redeemed at the This Old House display booth.

Local garden centers are always happy to see you at this time of year. Stop in to shop for seeds, enjoy the beautiful displays and tropical house plants. Bring your questions, since the experts on staff are eager to talk about gardens, and they aren't as busy as they will be in April and May.

FEATURED HOUSE PLANT

CYCLAMEN PERSICUM

Cyclamen is one of the most popular flowering house plants of winter. They are easy to care for and can be kept blooming for months and months if conditions are right. They are also popular Valentine's Day gifts as their colors run towards reds, pinks, magenta and white. The flowers hover like butterflies over the green glossy leaves, which are often veined and marbled in beautiful patterns of silver.



Cyclamen bloom during the cooler seasons of fall, winter and spring. Indoor specimens should be kept cool, ideally between 55° and 60° F. Most will do all right if the night time temperature gets close to 60° F. If cyclamen is kept in a room that is too warm, the plant will stop flowering and it will move into its summer growth phase.

Cyclamen grow from a bulb-like structure called a corm, which you may see protruding halfway out of the soil. The leaves and flowers stem all grow out of the top of the corm, while the roots grow downward into the soil. The corm is somewhat sensitive to moisture, so to prevent rotting, avoid watering directly on the crown. Instead spread the water evenly over the soil surface. Cyclamen prefer soil

that is evenly moist during the bloom period. Dry soil, like warm temperatures, can signal the plant that the blooming season has come to an end. High humidity is also desirable, and cyclamen benefit from sitting on a tray of stones moistened with water.

Individual flowers will eventually fade and wither. Pinch the flower off its stalk, and then wait a few days to remove the stem. The stem will dry out and separate naturally from the corm with a gentle tug. This technique ensures that the corm does not accumulate stubs of stems that will hold moisture and encourage rot. This also stimulates the corm to begin producing a new flower, which will soon poke its pointed beak-like bud through the leaves as it climbs to join the rest of the flowery flock. Occasionally one of the lower leaves may turn yellow as it is covered by newer leaves. Follow the same procedure for removing bad leaves as you would for removing faded flowers.

It is possible to keep cyclamen cool and moist enough to make them bloom for over a year. Most likely, warm summer weather will end the flower bud production. At this time, the cyclamen should be fertilized lightly and water as usual. Soon the leaves will also yellow and drop off as the plant enters its dormant phase. Gradually reduce the watering until the leaves are all gone, then let the soil dry out completely. Leave the corm in the pot and store it in a cool, dark place for the rest of the summer.

In September, carefully remove the corm from the old soil and note which side is the top. Wash the pot out and fill it with new, sterile all-purpose potting soil. Set the corm so its top half sits above the soil. When the first leaf appears, start watering the soil, and prepare to enjoy your cyclamen for another year.

FEATURED HOUSE PLANT

BEGONIA X HIEMALIS

Another easy flowering houseplant is the Reiger begonia or Elatior begonia. They will bloom for months with proper light and treatment, rewarding your care with profuse blooms of white, pink, red, orange or yellow. Some even produce two-toned flowers. Begonia leaves are sturdy and a shiny deep green. The stems produce numerous dormant buds making it easy to pinch back and propagate from cuttings.



Reiger begonias continue to bloom if given moderate light such as it would receive from an east-facing window. About twelve hours of light per day is right – too many hours of light can end the blooming phase. Direct sunlight, especially midday sun in summer, can scorch the leaves. If the leaves turn a reddish or bronzy color, reduce or filter the light it receives. During the short days of winter, maintain a twelve-hour light period with artificial lighting.

Reiger begonias have waxy, succulent stems and leaves that are capable of storing plenty of water in its tissues. They do best if the soil is allowed dry out slightly between waterings. Moist air can promote powdery mildew on the leaves, so always avoid wetting the leaves when watering, and never mist them. It is best to water the plant by placing the pot in a tray of water

and allowing the soil to soak up moisture for ten or fifteen minutes. Be sure to let any excess water drain out of the pot after watering. Good air circulation will also help prevent mildew problems.

After several weeks or months in bloom, the begonia may begin to look leggy with long stems and fewer leaves and flowers. When this happens, stop watering for one week. Trim the plant back to about four inches high, so that only three or four nodes are left along the stem. This means that the stems coming out of the soil will have only three or four leaves or branching points left. Wait another five to seven days before watering. Allowing the plant to dry will promote healing of the cuts and stimulate dormant buds along the stem and below the soil surface to begin growing. Soon new leaves will begin to appear, and new flower buds should emerge soon after.

This process may be repeated for a third growth cycle before the plant should be repotted. Replace the old soil with fresh new potting soil, preferably a mix intended for African violets. Set the plant about a quarter-inch higher than it was in the old pot to help prevent crown rot.

Stem pieces removed during pruning will root readily to produce new plants. Let a one-inch stem section from the lower part of the plant dry for a few days before placing it halfway into slightly moist soil.

Fertilizer should be used sparingly, if at all, while the begonia is in bloom. Mild doses of fertilizer will help the begonia recover after pruning. Be aware that ardent feeding will cause the begonia to produce many leaves and grow excessively large and will prevent the production of flowers. Reiger begonias really do thrive on “neglect,” and most problems are the result of too much water or fertilizer.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

ICE MELTERS

Ice melting chemicals are useful for clearing driveways and sidewalks, but they can be damaging to plants and pavement, even if used as directed. Nearly all ice melters are in the chemical category of salts, which work by keeping water liquid at temperatures below 32° F. Salts in the soil damage plants by preventing the roots from absorbing water, or even by drawing water out of the roots. Much of the salts will eventually wash out, but some will bind to the soil and can build up from year to year.

Remove as much ice and snow as possible by mechanical means. This will reduce the amount of ice melter required and achieve faster results. Use only the amount needed to do the job, and never use more than specified on the label.

Never use ice melting chemicals on concrete less than one year old as they can promote pitting and chipping of the surface. If extra traction is required, use sand or wood ash, but be careful to avoid tracking these substances into the house.

Keep ice melters away from pavement edges near plantings and lawns, especially when the soil is not frozen. Apply gypsum to areas that are expected to get salt (sodium chloride), including the strip of lawn near the street. Gypsum helps the salt leach out of the soil, but may not be enough with heavy or chronic salt damage.

GARDEN CALENDAR

- February is National Bird Feeding Month – start feeding birds, or try a new food or feeder.
- Set out birdhouses this month.
- Clean, sharpen and oil garden tools to prepare them for spring tasks.
- Prune fruit, nut and shade trees when temperatures are above freezing.
- If plants have been heaved out of the soil by frost, apply mulch around the roots and replant them next month.
- Make sure all your seed orders have been placed this month.
- Prepare your seed starting area by assembling your supplies: seeds, lights, soil, flats, cell packs, markers and pots.
- Test seeds left over from last year by folding several in a damp paper towel. Keep this in a warm, dark place for several days. If less than half the seeds sprout, buy new seed.
- Reapply anti-desiccant to evergreens when temperatures are above 40° F.
- Cut branches of flowering trees and shrubs and place them in water to force out early blooms indoors.
- Plan new landscaping projects like a rock garden or perennial border.
- Enjoy counting birds and helping scientists by participating in the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) February 16 – 19.
- Revive memories of spring by visiting a flower show, botanical garden, greenhouse or garden center.
- Attend a gardening class or seminar.
- Inspect houseplants for problems and signs of over watering.



ROGER S. BOLGER HAS OVER TEN YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE AND HAS GARDENED ALL HIS LIFE IN NORTHEAST OHIO. HE HAS GIVEN DOZENS OF GARDENING TALKS AND SPECIALIZES IN WOODY PLANTS, PERENNIALS, TURF, ENTOMOLOGY, INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT, ORGANIC GARDENING, PONDS AND BACKYARD WILDLIFE.

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