



## January Gardening Tasks

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It's winter and you aren't quite sure what gardening tasks to do this month. Here are several items that can be completed in January.

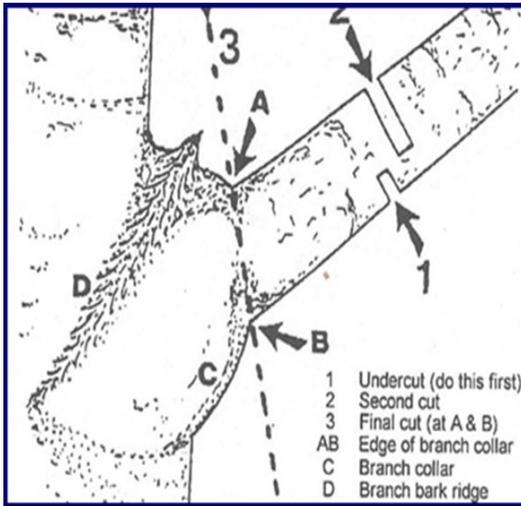
- Get a soil test. The first rule of gardening is to start with a strong foundation of good soil. If you have not had your soil tested yet, now is the time to get it done so you will know how to improve it. Don't guess, get it from the experts at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. You can pick up soil sample test kits at the Grimes County AgriLife Extension Office in Navasota. After getting your soil test results, amend accordingly so you have a head-start on spring planting.
- Prune and thin out trees: Look at our article on Page Two for the proper way to prune trees and shrubs and when to do so.
- Sharpen and clean your gardening tools: Dull and dirty tools can make gardening harder and also expose plants to bacteria. Look on Page Three for proper tool maintenance.
- Plant spring blooming bulbs now.
- Plant hardy trees, shrubs, roses, pecan and fruit trees now. Dormant fruit trees will have time to establish before spring growth begins. Montgomery County Master Gardeners will have a Fruit and Nut Tree Sale on Saturday, January 29th.
- Apply dormant oil to deter scale and insect pests.
- Rake up leaves so your turf grass isn't smothered. St. Augustine turf is not fully dormant and will benefit from sunlight to replenish its reserves.
- Mulch or shred your leaves and start a leaf mold bin. See our article on Page Three on how to make a leaf mold bin.
- Start seedlings indoors: Get a head start on your spring garden seeds by starting them now indoors. Be sure to use grow lights instead of windowsills so your seedlings don't get too leggy.
- Don't prune off freeze damaged plant material, it actually provides insulation for the rest of the plant. Wait until March or early spring to cut off the damaged parts.
- Water your lawn at least once in January if the rainfall does not exceed 2 or 3 inches.



## *Proper Pruning of Trees and Shrubs*

January and February are the months to start pruning large trees and shrubs. For most trees, pruning should take place in winter when the trees are dormant and new growth has not started. Pruning at the wrong time of year can increase insect and bacteria infestations. The only exception to this rule is spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas which bloom on last season's growth. They should be pruned soon after blooming has stopped which will allow for summertime growth and the addition of flower buds the following year.

Why prune at all? Most trees and shrubs will naturally have branches that will fall off with time so it's not absolutely

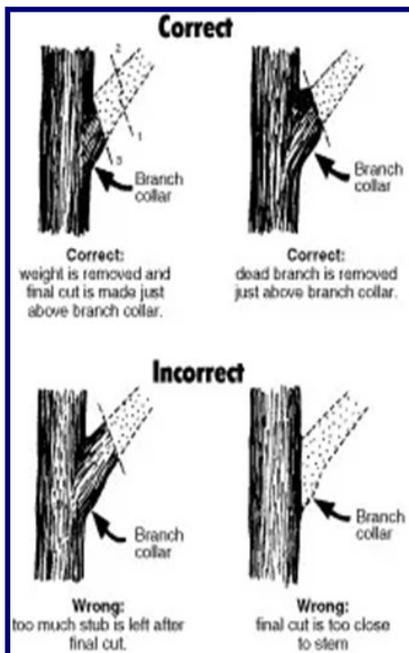


necessary to prune them. But if done properly and correctly, pruning can enhance the beauty and growth of a tree or shrub. The main reasons for pruning are: 1) to train the plant, 2) to maintain plant health, 3) to improve the quality of flowers, fruit, foliage, or stems, and 4) to restrict growth.

The diagram to the left shows the correct way to prune a tree branch. Correct pruning should be made as close as possible to the branch collar. Do not injure or remove the branch collar. Do not cut behind the branch bark ridge.

What is the branch collar? The branch collar, or sometimes called the callus roll, is the raised area that surrounds the base of every branch.

Wound Dressing: Once cut, you don't need to paint the open cut with pruning paint. This does little to prevent insect or disease damage. The only time to paint an open cut is on oak trees that might be susceptible to oak wilt so the bark beetle can't spread the disease. The picture to the right shows a tree branch collar healing up. After a few years of pruning the tree collar will completely cover up the tree wound.



Pruning Mistakes: Topping a tree. As seen mostly with crape myrtles, a gardener should never top off a tree to make it fit into a landscape. By choosing the right size for your landscape you will not be tempted to top a tree off. Topping makes the tree weaker and sends it into shock. It will also cause the tree to respond by replacing the lost branches with bushy immature growth.

Stub Cuts: Learn to recognize the collar of a tree limb. Proper pruning takes place right at the collar – not several inches away from it. This will cause damage to the tree eventually.

Flush Cuts: The opposite of stub cuts, is cutting too far past the collar. The reason pruning is done at the collar is so that the tree will naturally heal over properly.

Ripping Bark: Using dull blades can make for a messy cut which can lead to ripping the bark. Ripping bark is like cutting open the skin of a tree leaving it susceptible to fungus, pests and other damage.

## *Tool Time*

Having dirty, rusty, and dull tools can make your gardening chores a lot more difficult not to mention you might be spreading bacteria from one dirty tool to areas around your property. Now that the growing season has ended, take advantage of your hours to properly clean and sharpen all of your garden tools.

Supplies: Detergent, sprayer, sponge, old rags, steel wool, scrub brush, wire brush, sandpaper, metal file, lubricating oil. Don't forget to wear safety equipment.

Step 1: Remove any mud by scrubbing blades and handles. Dry with old rags and set overnight to dry completely.

Step 2: Remove rust by using

either steel wool or a wire brush. Remove just the rust and no further as you don't want to impact the tool by making it weaker or thinner.

Step 3: Sand and smooth worn spots on handles and blades.

Step 4: Sharpen the edges lightly. Using a metal file smooth out nicks and gouges but not too much or you will thin the metal and weaken it. For pruning equipment, put the tool in a vise to hold steady. Make short strokes with the file moving up and out away from the blade.

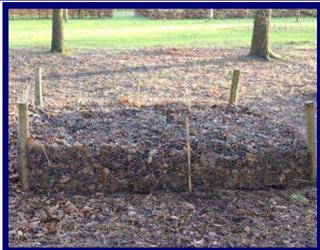
Step 5: Use a clean rag to apply lubricating oil on

wooden handles and metal blades. You can use linseed oil, coconut oil, or WD-40. This will help prevent rust and cracking. Wipe off excess oil and hang tools to dry.

Remember, a clean and sharp tool will be your gardening friend for many seasons to come.



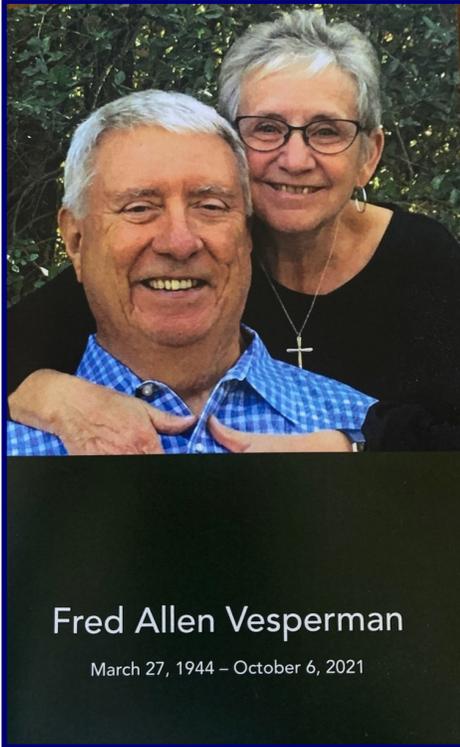
## *How to Build a Leaf Mold Bin*



Rake up those leaves and put them in a home-made bin to create a leaf mold bin. Why bother? Well, it's a great way to remove leaves from your yard and utilize them without filling up a landfill. Leaf mold is basically decomposed leaves that is dark brown, has a earthy aroma and texture much like compost. It's an excellent way to amend your soil for better water retention (as much as 50%), improve soil structure, and provide a good habitat for soil life such as earthworms and beneficial bacteria. Be aware that this is a long term project as leaves can take a long time to decompose—between 6 to 12 months. But if you start today and keep the bin going, you just might have enough leaf mold to start putting in your soil by May.

1. Pile fallen leaves in a wood or wire bin such as the one pictured above. **Shredded** leaves decompose quicker. So the smaller they are the faster they will become leaf mold.
2. Once in the bin, water the leaves so they are damp but not soggy. Water periodically as needed to keep moist.
3. Use a pitchfork or some heavy duty implement to turn the leaves at least once a week. This helps speed up the decomposition.
4. You can cover the bin with a plastic tarp or cover to help keep the leaves moist.

## *In Memoriam*



Fred Vesperman, a long-term member of Grimes County Master Gardeners, passed away October 6, 2021. Fred was a valued member who trained as a Master Gardener in 2007 after having grown up in a gardening family. Always looking for opportunities, Fred learned about another County's Master Gardener Co-Op program and took the initiative while still an Intern to start the Grimes County Master Gardeners Co-Op. He and his wife, Alvie, have been managing the Co-op ever since. The Co-op's purpose is to provide gardening tools and literature for our members and the community.

Fred earned Master's Degrees in Physics from the University of Kentucky and the University of Texas. He started his career at Boeing in 1968 and was assigned to the Apollo 14 Mission Control. Fred held various positions at different companies throughout Texas, one of which developed the Petscan.

From a 12-acre plot in Tomball, Fred and Alvie eventually moved in 1999 to a 300-acre ranch in Grimes County to start a cattle ranching business. The ranch gave them the opportunity to also do large-scale gardening where Alvie says they "produced too much food but learned from their mistakes." They eventually moved to their current home of 15 acres outside of Navasota, where they built raised vegetable garden beds and had beautiful butterfly gardens surrounding their home. Still very active in Master Gardeners, Fred was known for his gardening knowledge and volunteering.

Always inquisitive, knowledgeable with a subtle sense of humor, Fred will be sorely missed by his Master Gardeners friends.



# 2021 Christmas Social



**Events**

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their **January Business Meeting via Zoom on Tuesday, January 11th, starting at 9:00 a.m.**

Garden Workday will be Tuesday, **January 18th** at the Navasota Extension Office.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, many in-person continuing education classes are not available. Below are some virtual learning and webinars for this month.

# January 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					



**GOT A GARDENING QUESTION?**

Got a gardening problem or question?

Contact our Master Gardeners to get help: [grimescountymastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:grimescountymastergardeners@gmail.com) or call us at [936-873-3917](tel:936-873-3917).

**Continuing Education and Events**

- Jan 6: Home Grown Series, Harris County Agrilife, , **“Starting Plants from Seeds”** 10:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m. , Zoom
- Jan 8: Montgomery Master Gardeners, **“Enhance your Landscape with Trees”**, 9:00 a.m.—12:00 a.m., In-Person, Check website for tickets: \$5.
- Jan 24: Urban Harvest, **“Edible & Medicinal Winter Weeds”**, 7:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m., Zoom, \$20
- Jan 26: Urban Harvest, **“Gardening Microgreens & Cold Crops”**, 5:00 p.m.—6:00 p.m., Zoom, \$20
- Jan 29: Montgomery Master Gardeners, **“Fruit and Nut Tree Sale”**, 9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m., Tom LeRoy Building, Conroe

# Texas Master Gardeners

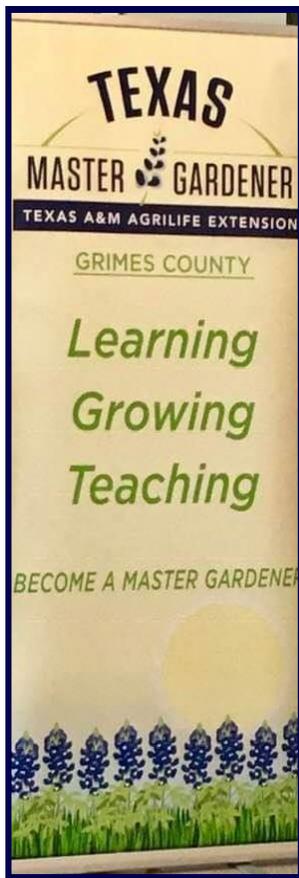
203 Veterans Memorial Drive  
Navasota, Texas 77868

Website: [txmg.org/grimes](http://txmg.org/grimes)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners](http://www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners)



## Grimes County Master Gardeners

Please send submissions and photos by the 20th of each month to: [pwparmley@gmail.com](mailto:pwparmley@gmail.com)



## 2022 Board of Directors

President.....Paula Parmley  
Vice President .....Kimberly Hertan  
Secretary .....Renee Harter  
Treasurer .....Kyle Braswell

## 2022 Committees/Chairs

Administrative.....Connie Arden  
Advertising/Publicity.....Peggy Sloan  
Auditing.....Jena Jackson  
Community Garden.....Cathey Hardeman  
Co-op.....Jena Jackson  
Fair Judging.....Vicki Wood  
Fundraising.....Carol Garnet  
Historian.....Sharon Murry  
Intern Class Coordination.....Herb Abraham  
Junior Master Gardener.....Kay Douglas  
Newsletter.....Paula Parmley  
Nominating.....Carol Garnet  
Social Media.....Jamie Bruns  
Scholarship Program.....Kimberly Hertan/Renee Harter  
Speakers Bureau.....Ann DeWitt  
Timekeeping.....Martha Brogdon