News Release

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Winter Challenges Gardeners

Everyone thinks gardeners have nary a care in winter. Not true, not true. We pore over seed catalogs, dreaming of new varieties of tomatoes and squash. We plan new beds, order trellises, ponder fencing and fondle our new garden gloves, oh-so-ready for spring.

And when winter wallops our gardens, we spring into action. Good gardeners know to broom heavy snow off shrubs with an upwards sweep to avoid damage. Removing ice usually causes more harm than good, so we just enjoy the sparkle. And pray.

If snow, ice or winter winds break a few branches, we reach for our loppers and pruning shears. A clean cut with a sharp tool speeds healing. No ragged, jagged edges allowed. And if the job is too big for us, we call in a professional to preserve the health of the tree.

We’re careful about the stuff we put down to de-ice our sidewalks, too. Most de-icers are harmful to both our plants and environment and can prematurely age concrete sidewalks and driveways and corrode metal on cars and aluminum siding.

Environmentally aware gardeners look for kinder, gentler solutions. We use sand, ashes or kitty litter to improve traction on icy areas. And if our roadside plants are affected by salt, we know to flush the area with several 1-inch applications of water in the spring.

Winter walks are good for us and our gardens. We know to be vigilant, visiting our gardens year-round to enjoy them and to spot problems that need to be fixed. As with all things in life, fixing problems when they are small often prevents them from becoming big and bad.
A recent stroll through my garden let me catch and fix a few challenges while enjoying abundant birdsong. Those bucks I saw in my meadow spent a few minutes scratching their antlers on my pussy willow, rasping the bark and breaking a few branches. Out came my pruners.

The mulch is breaking down around my native willow oak, so I need to reapply to the proper 3-inch depth. My clematis trellis is rotting a bit at the base, so I need to saw off the damage or replace it altogether.

A few perennials were heaving up from the freeze-thaw cycles, so I gently tamped them down. As my ornamental grasses waved their tassels in greeting, I made a mental note to mark my calendar to cut them back in March.

A 20-minute winter walk is good exercise and a great way to keep your green thumb busy. Look for inspiration in your own yard. Who knows what you’ll find? For more inspiration, head for the Hagerstown Community College Flower & Garden Show on March 16 and 17. Visit our Master Gardener display to learn about rain barrels, rain gardens, native plants and other Bay-Wise and sustainable gardening techniques. See you there.

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