February Tips:

Winter Wildlife!

As food becomes scarce during cold weather, skunks, fox, coyotes, opossum, raccoons and other wildlife will come closer to homes. Remove food sources like pet food and keep trash can lids tightly secured. Keep attic and basement doors closed to keep mice and other critters out of the home. Chimney caps will prevent squirrels and raccoons from coming down the chimney. Read HG 90 Dealing with Nuisance Wildlife.

Winter Burn

February is the month when most ‘winter burn’ (brown needles or leaves) occurs. Winter burn (desiccation) results from a combination of cold drying wind, fluctuating temperatures from very cold to warm sunny days, and frozen soil. To reduce damage, consider spraying an anti-desiccant material on vulnerable shrubs (hollies, boxwood, nandina and other broadleaf evergreens).

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Starting transplants under fluorescent lights

GIEI blog contributor and UME Master Gardener Kent Phillips explains his processes for starting plants indoors with his impressive fluorescent lights set up. Now is the time to start onion and cabbage transplants for the garden.

Kent gets into all the technical details of models of fixtures and their different light outputs. This is a great place to start if you'd like to begin starting seeds indoors over the winter. The time is now!

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Imagine your blueberries missing from the cereal bowl. Those almonds you keep as an afternoon pick-me-up gone. A third of your dinner plate empty.

That’s the future entomology Assistant Professor Dennis vanEngelsdorp is fighting to prevent—and now, he and his dedication to saving the honey bees are the subject of a new short film premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah (Jan. 22–Feb. 1).

VanEngelsdorp hopes the film can help people "make constructive decisions in their own environments to help pollinators." These include planting meadows with flowering plants, instead of a grass lawn; not using pesticides; supporting beekeepers by buying local honey; and becoming a beekeeper. Maryland will offer its first two-day beginning beekeeping class, open to the public, March 28-29.

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We would recommend getting rid of the ivy. It has become an invasive pest throughout the eastern U.S. and smothers out vegetation at all levels. Additionally, when allowed to grow tall and in the sun, it blooms and produces seeds which are dispersed widely by birds. The way to get rid of it without harming your tree is fairly simple:

Wait until the growing season when everything is green and growing again, and then simply cut or saw through the vine down near where it grows at the base of the tree trunk, and then immediately paint the cut surface (the side with the roots) with a product like containing the active ingredient triclopyr, like Brush-B-Gone. This is a systemic herbicide which is taken into the root system of the vine and kills it. The top of the vine will die over time as it no longer has roots. Be sure to follow all label instructions carefully.