

A YEAR IN THE GARDEN

**365 Inspirational Gardens
and Gardening Tips**



Gisela Keil · Jürgen Becker

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Preface

“The garden has become a focal point for influences from all over the world. The little piece of cosmos around our house is slowly turning into a magic workshop with ever more precious possibilities,” wrote Karl Foerster, the great plant lover and garden designer, almost a hundred years ago. How right he still is today!

It's true – gardens are a constant temptation to be playful and creative with their huge repertoire of plants, colours, shapes and materials. They're refuges in which children can have their first encounters with nature and gather impressions which will stay with them for a lifetime. These sanctuaries are becoming more and more attractive for an increasing number of young people, especially in cities – and persons of a more advanced age can find fortitude and enjoyment in them too. This isn't surprising, for every garden is a green “magic workshop” – a parallel dimension to our automated and digitalised everyday life where we can come very close to the numerous facets and cycles of nature and sensual reality again. Most people

perceive these paradises of personal freedom and creativity as being gratifying places in which to experience leisure and activity as well as companionship and solitude.

This diary is intended as a companion to the year in the garden and presents seasonal design ideas as well as tips on plants and practical gardening methods in daily instalments.

Splendid images show picturesque gardens of all styles as the seasons change. Of course, there's also space in the diary for daily notes, reminders and observations so that we can record everything the year in the garden gives us.

Gisela Keil and Jürgen Becker wish you a happy gardening year full of wishes which come true, plants which flourish magnificently, ideas which stand the test of time – and weeds which stay away.

Gisela Keil and Jürgen Becker

1 January

The garden year begins gently with a period of rest, a pause for thought, which – in the case of passionate garden lovers – should in no way be equated with doing nothing. In fact, the focus now is on the creative examination of the paradise you've created. It's wonderful, and a charming gesture, whenever winter throws in a few cheerful sunny days to lure us outside. The structure and skeleton of the garden will never be as visible as it is now, nor will its weak points ever manifest themselves more honestly than during these weeks in which the garden is stripped of its leaves. But not only beauty can fire your imagination – shortcomings can too! Now is the time to play through potential improvements, weigh up possibilities and turn your wishes into reality. In short: it's time to make plans, for the gardening year has already begun!

Notes / Birthdays

Who wouldn't like to take a seat in this wintry idyll and let his or her gaze wander off into the distance? But the mere contemplation of a successful design can also make you happy – and inspire creativity.

Garden: Elisabeth Imig and Silke Imig-Gerold (D)

January



2 January

Evergreen cut hedges and other trees and shrubs bordering on streets suffer threefold when road salt is used in winter. If the salt penetrates into the ground with the meltwater, it impairs the absorbance of nutrients, causes cells to die off and damages life in the soil. Before that happens, however, the salt gets to the trees and shrubs in the form of splash water. Dead brown leaf edges and needles, curled brown shoot apices and permanent poor growth are the result.

- Walls and pedestals help against salting of the soil.
- You can protect the hedges from splash water by fastening heavy-duty plastic film (up to 1.8 metres high) to wooden slats and installing this in front of the hedge throughout the winter.

Notes / Birthdays

The entrance to this garden is enough in itself to arouse your curiosity and make you wonder what kind of paradise awaits the visitor behind the romantically overgrown gate in this beech hedge.

Garden: De Heerenhof (NL)

January



3 January

If plants are in hibernation now, does that mean that they sleep at other times as well? Science's answer is "Yes". Carl von Linné (1707–1778) was one of the first to observe that flowers open and close their blossoms in a day–night rhythm even when they're kept in a dark cellar. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) observed that small plants also let their leaves and stalks hang overnight, and he called this "sleep" too.

Now, researchers at the Finnish Geospatial Research Institute have found out, with the aid of laser scanner technology, that fully grown trees literally "sink into sleep" by as much as 10 cm at night. Then, in the morning, leaves and branches return to their original position.

Notes / Birthdays

Even a garden made to look beautiful in winter with its shrubs, grasses and trees looks numbed and lifeless in the shade. It takes the golden rays of the sun to make it come to life again.

Garden: De Hagenhof (NL)

January



4 January

Make sure at regular intervals that your pond is free of ice in at least one place so that any fish and amphibians hibernating in it get enough oxygen. If the ice covering the pond is closed, don't hack it open, for the sound waves will cause suffering to the pond's inhabitants. Instead, thaw open a hole in the ice and drain off sufficient pond water to create a clear gap between the surface of the water and the sheet of ice.

This layer of air will allow the necessary exchange of gas to take place. Those who wish to do so can then vertically place straw or reed mats tied together into this area to keep it free of ice.

Notes / Birthdays

If the entire pond is frozen and snowy – and not just the edge – clear away some of the snow to allow the light to reach the fish and plants.

January



5 January

Not all rambler roses are equally winter-hardy. Annual blooming varieties, many of which reward us in autumn with countless rose-hips in small bunches, are regarded as being especially frost-resistant. Examples include ‘American Pillar’ (crimson pink), ‘Chevy Chase’ (blood red), *Rosa helenae* (white), ‘Polstjärnan’ (white), ‘Lykkefund’ (white, prickly-free), ‘Goldfinch’ (light yellow). Robust varieties need no protection. Remove frozen shoots in spring. If they freeze back radically, roses sprout strongly after being cut back, enabling them to reach their original height again after two years. In the case of more sensitive varieties, you should pile up soil around the base and loosely wrap reed, coconut or straw mats around them at the bottom.

Notes / Birthdays

Rose-hips are little vitamin bombs. Three normal-size fruits are enough to cover the vitamin C requirements of an adult. The tiny fruits of the rambler roses cannot quite keep up here and are inedible after frost. They still look nice, though, and remain a delicacy for birds.

January



6 January

Snow can be both good and bad for the garden. While providing perfectly insulating protection, it can also cause damage to trees and shrubs.

Powdery snow has the best insulating properties: it's light and is produced in calm weather from fine dry snowflakes. These consist of snow crystals whose shapes differ greatly depending on the temperature at which they formed in the clouds.

Small snowflakes which the wind sticks together to form a firm blanket of snow are dangerous for trees and shrubs – but even more dangerous are large snowflakes which become wet and heavy when temperatures in the soil increase. Both types of snow can lead to breakages, especially in the case of evergreens.

Notes / Birthdays

That snow and hoar frost will cover even Mediterranean sea holly is evident from this example of sea holly (*Eryngium*). They turn the blossoms, which keep all winter long, into ethereal appetisers.

January



7 January

Spruce and fir tree branches provide an alternative to snow as a natural winter protection. At the time of the greatest cold, their coat of needles is still dense and holds off icy winds, black frosts and strong sunshine. They begin to shed their needles in spring and let light through, so that the soil can slowly start to heat up again. They offer a variety of uses:

- You can lay them over plants and mulch.
- You can insert brushwood twigs into the ground at an angle around the plant.
- With fruit trees and climbing trees growing on a trellis, fix the branches over one another to form scales. This enables the meltwater to run off the outside and not into the plant.

Tip: Christmas tree branches can be used for this purpose too.

Notes / Birthdays

Not only plants need frost protection – water-filled vessels need it too. You should empty them before the frost sets in and cover them up with a film or with boards so that ice can't break them open.

Garden: Elisabeth Imig and Silke Imig-Gerold (D)

January



8 January

The number of birds is declining dramatically. Breeding pairs in agricultural regions of the EU, for example, decreased by 57 per cent – equivalent to 300 million birds – between 1980 and 2010. Ever fewer birds are coming into gardens and parks too. Even though feeding the birds there benefits only 10 to 15 different species, most of which are not endangered, it does at least connect the aspect of helping with the joy of experiencing nature. Provide the feed at different places which birds can easily find but which cats can't access. Grain eaters such as tits, finches, bullfinches and sparrows like sunflower seeds and grain mixtures. Eaters of soft feed such as robins, dunnocks, blackbirds, fieldfares and wrens should be given raisins, fruit, oat flakes and bran placed close to the ground and protected against moisture.

Notes / Birthdays

Wreaths and branches from the garden are especially suitable for attractive outdoor decorations, and can also welcome birds with ornamental apples and bird-feeding rings. Grain eaters and soft feed eaters love these fat rings.

Garden: Elisabeth Imig and Silke Imig-Gerold (D)

January



9 January

If your interest in plants is restricted to the blossoms, you often miss some important things. This is also true of the unjustly neglected group of yellow-blooming clematis, such as *Clematis orientalis*, *Clematis tangutica* and *Clematis serratifolia* and their varieties. All extremely winter-hardy and free of ailments, they grace the garden from June to early spring. Their mainly bell- or balloon-shaped yellow flowers appear until November. These are followed by fluffy silvery seed pods, most of which survive the winter. In spring, cut the plants back to between 20–60 cm – and wait for the fresh splendour to come.

Tip: *Clematis vitalba* has silvery woolly fruits. Be careful, however, for this species needs a lot of space and is extremely hard to keep in check in small and medium-size gardens.

Notes / Birthdays

Hoar frost has iced up the hairy seed pods of this clematis with a silvery glamour. But even without this treatment, they look enchanting all winter long. Afterwards, the hairs function as a flying aid for the seeds.

January



10 January

All is quiet in the fruit and vegetable garden. In addition to winter leeks, there are green cabbages and winter varieties of Brussels sprouts to harvest. These can all withstand temperatures down to -10°C . When temperatures are low, you should cover them up with brushwood or fleece. Green and red cabbages are harvested from the bottom to the top, and light frost gives them a better flavour. Both types of cabbage store sugar with the help of photosynthesis and low temperatures. At below-zero temperatures, the plant's own enzymes are put out of action, as they would otherwise decompose the sugar again. This increases the sugar content of green cabbage and Brussels sprouts and makes them tastier. More recent varieties of green cabbage have a higher sugar content anyway, so you can harvest them all year round, even if there's no frost.

Notes / Birthdays

White cabbages still remaining in the bed are varieties of autumn cabbage, which are planted in October and harvested in spring. Unlike green cabbages (at the back), they need a protective covering once temperatures drop below -5°C .

January



11 January

No matter how magical gardens look under a blanket of snow, it must, for reasons of safety, be cleared away from the driveway, house entrance and pavement alongside the plot. In densely populated regions, you often have to shovel the snow into your own front garden for lack of space. This should be taken into account when you plant your front garden. Robust shrubs which have retracted their leaves can withstand snow weighing down on them for a few weeks. Roses and evergreens and other ornamental trees and shrubs, however, can break under the weight. You should also try not to use de-icing salt. It not only damages the plants, but can also harm soft natural stone such as limestone, marble and sandstone in pathways and terrace coverings.

Notes / Birthdays

In winter too, box hedges distinctly trace the outlines of pathways and herbaceous borders. A blanket of snow even gives these evergreen “structuralists” a more striking plasticity than in summer.

Garden and design: Peter Janke (D)

January



12 January

If you're looking for a new and highly decorative element for your garden, you could start planning a knot garden. While herbs and fragrant plants were once preferred for the interlacing ornaments and checkerboard patterns, box is mainly used nowadays (varieties such as 'Suffruticosa' and 'Blauer Heinz'). No matter whether the bed is created with one plant only, with two or three different green tones or with two different colours, begin by sketching the pattern. To transfer it to the bed, use a grid of taut strings in longitudinal and crosswise direction (at a distance of 50 × 50 cm). Then transfer the pattern to the squares, mark it with light-coloured sand and put in the plants along the lines.

Notes / Birthdays

A knot garden has the greatest effect when seen from above. The two colours seen here are produced by box and the red, summergreen Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Atropurpurea').

Garden: Kristin Lammerting (D)

January



13 January

Sphere, cone, figure or hedge – topiarised evergreen trees and shrubs continue to be ordering elements in winter too. They structure gardens, set accents and create separate spaces. This requires a certain amount of care.

- After large snowfalls, topiarised trees and shrubs such as box, yew, holly and cherry laurel must be cleared of snow.
- After cold periods, water them generously on frost-free days when the soil thaws out slightly. Otherwise they risk drying out because they're unable to draw any water from the frozen soil and yet keep on evaporating moisture through their foliage.
- In spots with full sun, use a fleece during the frost period to prevent the sun and the wind from drying them out.

Notes / Birthdays

Evergreen trees and shrubs, such as this beech cone topiarised into a spiral, become shapely sculptures when a downy blanket of snow makes their contours stand out.

Garden: De Hagenhof (NL)

January



14 January

While we use mats to protect the trunks of younger fruit trees from frost (see 30 December), older ones risk having their trunks split from January to March by the combined effects of frost and sun. What can happen is that the trunk heats up on the south side but stays covered in hoar frost on the north side. This can lead to a temperature difference of up to 20°C within the trunk. The fatter the trunk, the greater the risk that this temperature gradient will break open the bark. Protective measures include painting the trunk white up to the crown in order to reflect the heat, or leaning wooden planks against the south side of the trunks for as long as the intense frost continues. Before carrying out these measures, you should remove any pasting rings which may be attached (see 30 September).

Notes / Birthdays

In the informality of country house gardens, high trees remind us even in winter what a restful feeling it is to sit in their shade in summer.

Garden: Heiderose Birkenstock (D)

January



15 January

Walls in the garden should provide protection from intruders, noise and prying eyes. Aside from these useful functions, however, they also provide opportunities for a wide range of designs. Let your imagination run wild!

- A rose arch with a bench in front of the wall makes a romantic bower.
- Climbing plants integrate the walls into the green of the garden and make it seem larger.
- Trellises structure walls in an extremely attractive way. With a mirror behind them, they even form illusionistic windows and arches.

Walls can also be used for:

- wall fountains and water features
- plant racks and reliefs
- lean-to greenhouses and work tables
- espalier fruit in sunny spots.

Notes / Birthdays

In the form of a blind arch, this niche interrupts the course of the wall and provides a place to leave garden ornaments and any utensils you may need in the sitting area.

Garden: private garden, Majorca (E)

January



16 January

If you have an oriental garden, now is the time to walk around it with a watchful eye – for this is when popular trees used in this style begin to reveal typical signs of damage.

Ornamental cherries and other frost-sensitive trees and shrubs can be damaged by frost splitting the trunk (see 14 January). If there's already a split in the bark, wrap string tightly round the trunk on a frost-free day and smear the split with tree wax or another substance designed to close the wound.

Maples and other deciduous or berry trees can easily be diagnosed for coral spot while the leaves are bare. Red spots on dead shoots are tell-tale signs of this fungus. Cut the shoots back into the healthy wood (to a depth of at least 20 cm) and remove them. Don't put them on the compost heap!

Notes / Birthdays

The stillness of winter underlines the meditative power of oriental gardens. As their design is characterised by trees, shrubs and stones, they don't look empty at this time of the year either.

Garten and design: Reinhold Borsch (D)

January



17 January

How can snowflakes, which float down to earth as light as a feather, break thick branches? The answer lies in the variable weight of snow. In cold weather, the snow that falls is dry powder snow, which can weigh about 100 kg per cubic metre. Higher temperatures, by contrast, produce wet, large-flaked snow, a cubic metre of which can weigh up to 200 kg. Snow tends to remain lying on evergreen trees and shrubs such as holly, rhododendron, laurel cherry, box and conifers in much larger quantities than on bare trees. This is why you should shake off the snow after strong snowfall. To do this, beat against the trunks from below using a broom. Never beat against the branches as this would only increase the pressure. Also, shake the trees and shrubs carefully as frosty wood breaks easily.

Notes / Birthdays

In oriental gardens, the Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) has little to fear from blankets of wet snow. However, many evergreen grasses, especially bamboo, are pushed apart or bent more easily the larger they are.

Garden and design: Reinhold Borsch (D)

January



18 January

Bamboo is one of the evergreen grasses and should, like them, be protected from snow, sun, wind and – last but not least – drought. Water it on frost-free days, spread a 20-cm-high layer of mulch around the base, tie it together as a measure against falling snow, or use mats or fleece to protect it. *Fargesia murielae* and its varieties (which form clusters) and stoloniferous species of *Phyllostachys* (which have to be planted with a rhizome barrier) are winter-hardy down to -25°C . There's no need to worry if leaves are shed. Don't remove blades without leaves, as new leaves will sprout there in spring. The roots, however, should be prevented from drought. The protective mats can be removed on a dull day in March. The same is true for dead blades.

Notes / Birthdays

In contrast to bamboo, Japanese Silver Grass (*Miscanthus*), whose blades look so charming in winter, is not an evergreen. It can unfold its beauty freely in regions with little snow and rain, but in other areas should be tied together to form a tuft.

Garden: Anja and Piet Oudolf,
design: Piet Oudolf (NL)

January