

# November December 2018 Newsletter

Nature has many scenes to exhibit, and constantly draws a curtain over this part or that. She is constantly repainting the landscape and all surfaces, dressing up some scene for our entertainment. Lately we had a leafy wilderness; now bare twigs begin to prevail, and soon she will surprise us with a mantle of snow. Some green she thinks so good for our eyes that, like blue, she never banishes it entirely from our eyes, but has created evergreens. ~Henry David Thoreau, Nov. 8, 1858



## Lanark Floral Arts Christmas Workshop

Lanark Floral Arts Group is having a Christmas Centrepiece Workshop on December 1, 2018 from 9:00 to 12:00 upstairs at Mitchell's (Your Independent Grocery Store) in Carleton Place. The demonstration/workshop will be led by Cindy Zorgel.

Cindy will demonstrate a traditional round centerpiece and also a modern design using the same material and then participants can choose which one they would like to do for themselves.

We will be supplying the Floral Material – flowers and greenery. You will need to bring your own container, oasis or other means to support flowers, ribbon, ornaments and/or other Christmas décor, wire, cutters, floral arrangement supplies, etc. Maximum number of people for workshop will be 24, so please let me know as soon as possible, if you plan to attend. Cost: \$25.00 Deadline for registration and payment is Thursday, November 22, 2018. Payment can be made by cheque

(payable to Linda Bartlett) and mailed to Linda Bartlett, 1060 Ford Road, Perth, ON K7H 3C3 or by E-transfer to Linda email address: [imbartlett@mail.com](mailto:imbartlett@mail.com) – Question: What is money for? Password: LanarkArts

## How Plants Adapt to Cold

By Larry Hodgson

If you live in a cold climate, you've probably noticed that the first time temperatures drop to 40°F (5°C) in the fall, you find it really cold. It takes a winter coat, a wool hat and gloves before you feel at ease outdoors. However, if in February (in the Northern Hemisphere), the temperature is "only" 40 °F (5 °C), you find quite balmy and may even yourself unbuttoning your coat! Between October and February, you've acclimatized to winter conditions. But your acclimation will disappear as spring settles in. Thus, if there's sudden drop to 40°F (5°C) again in May, you'll haul out the winter coat, hat and gloves again ... and probably complain bitterly about how cold it is!



Lanark Orchid

Renals

Perth & District  
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Well, hardy plants have a similar process of acclimatization and deacclimatization. The short days and the gradual drop in temperatures of fall push cold-tolerant plants into deeper and deeper dormancy. They're at their hardiest in the middle of winter. Then, in the spring, the plant acclimates again to warmer temperatures and gradually loses its resistance to cold. Thus, a balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), one of the hardiest of all trees, one that won't flinch at  $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) in January, will be seriously damaged at only  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  in July. It has, by then, lost its winter hardiness.

How hardy plants adapt to the cold varies from one species to another. Some develop a kind of antifreeze that prevents their sap and cells from freezing, others reduce the amount of water in their cells (water expands as it freezes and can tear and kill cells as it does so), some lose their leaves in winter and others retreat completely underground. Most combine different methods.

In a perfect world (assuming a perfect world includes cold winters!), cold would set in gradually starting in September and temperatures would drop little by little from week to week. An Indian summer may be wonderful for humans, but it can seriously harm hardy plants, which can lose their resistance to cold if it lasts too long.

Where I live (Quebec), the fall of 2018 has been picture-perfect for plants so far: it literally has been getting colder week by week with no annoying Indian summer to set plants back. If this trend continues, the hardy plants in my region will spend the winter of 2018–2019 in excellent condition!

Did you know that "winter protection" (i.e. wrapping plants up for the winter), which I see many homeowners installing these days, actually doesn't protect against the cold? Even if you wrap your shrubs, trees and evergreens in burlap or geotextile, or build a covered cage around them, night temperatures inside these protections are essentially the same as those outside. Moreover, it's important that these protections be light in color. Dark wrappings absorb heat during the day and can actually reduce the plant's resistance to cold. When a really cold night follows a few days of unusual warmth, the plant can be severely damaged or even die. So burlap, cages and geotextiles don't keep the plants any warmer, but what they do accomplish is to minimize the drying effect of winter

wind. They are therefore especially useful for plants that are freshly planted and not yet settled in or those that are planted in a very windy site.

Personally, I don't use this kind of winter protection in my garden: it's too much work for the slight advantage that it gives ... when there is an advantage, that is; often, there is none. (I find many people wrap up plants that don't need any protection!) In addition, winter protection tends to help plants poorly adapted to local conditions to cling to life. I prefer to use plants that like my conditions. If a plant can't tolerate winter at my place, I'd rather it die quickly! I'll soon find a hardier replacement. The right plant in the right place: always the best thing to do!

There are, however, two "winter protections" that are very effective at protecting plants against the cold: snow and mulch.

To understand why, you need to know that the roots of most plants are much less hardy than their branches and leaves. They usually don't need to be, as soil is normally warmer than the air above due to "bottom heat," geothermal heat moving up from the depths of the earth all winter. But sudden drops in air temperature can cause deep freezing of unprotected soil, a disaster for plants.

Snow helps by keeping cold air from penetrating deeply into the ground. It's an excellent insulator, being mostly composed of stagnant air. For example, when the air is at a frigid  $5^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), for example, the soil below is rarely much colder than  $30^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-1^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) under a layer of 6 inches (15 cm) of snow. The more snow there is in winter, especially when it arrives early and stays late, the better condition your plants will be in come spring.

Mulch—a layer of organic matter covering the ground—acts in the same way as snow: it creates an insulating layer between sometimes extremely cold air and the soil below. Its advantage over the snow is that it is reliable: it doesn't suddenly melt away in mid-January, leaving your plants exposed, as snow can do. Moreover, snow on top of a winter mulch makes an even more effective insulation: it's a winning combination! I mulch just about all my plantings with chopped leaves, ensuring the best winter protection that money can buy... Oops! I suppose I didn't spend any money on my shredded leaf mulch, did I?

Whether you to wrap your shrubs for the winter or not is up to you, but remember the best winter protection is actually free: snow and leaf mulch!

# The Best Succulents For Indoors

*Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor  
University of Vermont*

So just what are “succulents”? Generally, they are tender (not tolerant of cold) plants with thick or fleshy leaves. In recent years a whole range of species have been introduced to gardeners, mainly as outdoor seasonal plants, but which make great plants indoors too. Here are ten good choices, starting with three of the older standards—aloe, ponytail palm, and jade plant.

Aloe (*Aloe vera*) is an ingredient often found in many skin and hair care products. It also is known to be very effective in treating burns, thus, it's a good lotion to keep handy in the kitchen near the stove. Or, gently rub some sap from a leaf on the burn, then repeat after a few minutes. The burn will go away, and the skin should heal quickly. In fact, some of the newer sunburn lotions are close to 100 percent aloe sap.

Although aloe is grown in desert gardens in mild climates, it can easily be grown as a potted plant in our climate as well. The aloe will produce offshoot plants, which can be removed and potted.

Pony-tail Palm (*Beaucarnea recurvata*) is not really a palm at all. It has a characteristic palm-like shape, stem and leaves, with an expanded and flaring base. The leaves are two to six feet long and are often twisted. The leaves actually do look like a pony-tail. The flowers and fruit are seldom seen in cultivation as plants must be quite large to produce them. Pony-tail palm has a moderate growth rate and is often used in interior beds or as a potted specimen. Indoors, it usually reaches a height of one to three feet and a width of one to two feet. Under high light in conservatories, or where it can be grown outdoors, it may reach 20 or more feet high, with the flaring base several feet across!

The Jade Plant (*Crassula ovata*) gets its name from the Latin *crassus* meaning thick or swollen, which refers to the leaves and stems of this and many other species. The leaves are glossy green (dark jade color, hence the name), and occasionally have red margins. One cultivar even has variegated leaves. The flowers are star-shaped and white to pale pink in color. Jade plant has a moderate growth rate and may grow one to two feet in height and width. The plant may need a heavy soil or pot to keep from toppling as older plants become top-heavy. When watering the jade plant, do not let the leaves get water on them because this will cause leaf spots. If you

are successful with this plant and want more, simply take leaf or stem cuttings and root them in potting mix to grow additional plants. Watch for mealybug insects, small white masses particularly where leaves join stems.

Zebra plant (*Haworthia fasciata*) is appropriately named for its thick, dark green, fleshy and quite pointed leaves that arise from low on the plant. They are quite marked with regular, horizontal white stripes. Since its roots are shallow, you can give it a shallow pot. Repot every year or two, as the plants need to get rid of old roots to grow new ones. It only grows about 5 or 6 inches tall and wide.

Panda plant (*Kalanchoe tomentosa*) has whitish leaves from the soft hairs covering them, making them irresistible to feel. Leaf edges often have attractive contrasting red hairs. This succulent grows upright, from 12 to 18 inches tall.

Hahn's bird's nest (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) often goes by its genus name of just *sansevieria* (said as san-se-Veer-ee-ah). It has a rosette of wide, tough leaves with irregular horizontal lighter bands. It tolerates low light. It is compact, only getting about 6 inches high and tall. Leaves are typically green, but you may find ones with some gold.

There are a range of echeveria (said as etch-eh-Veer-ee-ah) you may find, with thick leaves in rosettes of white, roses, and blues. Most remain a few inches high and wide. Don't let water sit in the rosettes or it may lead to rots. Remove any dead, lower leaves as these are a haven for mealybugs.

There are several senecio (said as sin-Ess-ee-o) you may find, generally with tubular steely blue or grayish green leaves, and going by descriptive names such as “chalk fingers” or “blue chalk sticks”. Some of these remain low, others can reach a foot or more tall and easily stretch if not in full light. If too tall, simply “pinch” them back to promote branching.

Pencil cactus (*Euphorbia tirucalli*) is actually related to the poinsettia, having a white milky sap (and other common name of Milkbush). Avoid getting the sap on skin or in eyes, as it may cause a reaction. Leaves as you might guess are pencil thickness, or less, and long. Plants can be highly branched and get 2 or 3 feet tall and wide inside (up to 30 feet tall in their native Africa and India), but are easily kept in bounds with judiciously pruning. This also helps correct leggy plants. One selection with fiery red and orange young leaves, turning green with age, is called Firesticks or a variation on this name.

Although succulents prefer high light, they often adapt well to low light of homes. Best is

bright light most the day, such as a south-facing window, or at least a half day of good sun as in an east-facing window. If your plant starts to "stretch", getting tall and lanky with space between leaves, it isn't getting enough light. Also, rotate plants weekly if they are bending toward a light or window. Succulents prefer the dry humidity of indoors, and don't like overwatering. But they do like warmth. Be sure to keep them away from door drafts, and from touching cold windows in winter. A well-drained soilless mix with sand or perlite is the best potting medium. Although the fertility needs for succulents is low, plants may become pale and red if it is too low or they are too dry. One fertilization in spring, with a general houseplant fertilizer, usually suffices.

Allow the potting medium to dry between waterings. Make sure pots don't sit in a saucer of water. Water less when the plant is inactive, perhaps only once every couple of weeks, but water well when you do. When plants are actively growing, probably water them once a week. One rule of thumb is that the thicker the leaves, generally the less water the plant needs. The thick leaves that make them "succulent" are designed to store water under dry conditions.

Jade plant and succulents with fleshy leaves are easy to propagate. If you want to make more plants, simply place leaves on damp soil to root and grow new plants.

Consider and look for succulents this growing season for outdoor containers, particularly smaller containers you might bring indoors to enjoy over winter. Look for small ones for smaller containers, dish gardens, or terrariums. Keep in mind they will eventually grow, some faster than others. Although they do well pot-bound, and this will slow growth, in a year or two they may need larger pots or at least repotting.

## Christmas Gifts for Gardeners

*By Dale Odorizzi  
Lanark County Master Gardeners*

Are you wondering what to buy for that gardener on your christmas list? We solicited master gardeners across ontario and the following are their suggestions. You may want to highlight some suggestions and leave it for your own gift giver.

- **Something literary.** A subscription to a

Canadian gardening magazine gives all year long and makes a good winter read in front of a warm fireplace.

- **Something to make gardening easier.** Ergonomic tools that make chores easier, a propane torch weeder for quickly killing weeds in interlocking brick, padded garden kneelers, multipurpose hori hori knife and a good bulb auger are a few good choices.

- **Something to make your gardens look and sound cheerful.** A good squirrel proof bird feeder, bird houses or a birdbath will attract useful, pleasant sounding visitors to your yard.

- **Something that addresses an important area of your gardening practices.** A transplant shovel just for dividing is one example. A special step-on weeder that removes the pesky weeds in your lawn is another.

- **Something to make one look forward to spring.** Stocking stuffers of heirloom seeds, growing pots, plant markers and mini garden gadgets are welcome unique gifts.

- **Something useful for the gadget minded.** A motion activated sprinkler to chase the dreaded deer, bunnies, squirrels and skunks. Solar lights or, ornate garden stepping stones help accent your own 'moon garden'.

- **Something to permit the gardener to choose their own gift.** A gift certificate to the gardener's favorite garden store or nursery or seed catalogue lets the gardener make their own selection. Attach a catalogue if you can.

- **Something special.** Obtain the gardener's favourite garden photo and have it enlarged and framed.

- **Something unusual but helpful.** There are many items like garden salves and soap, felt outdoor slippers, certificates for several yards of mulch, unique cultivators and garden implements, or garden decor that are always appreciated by anyone unwrapping them on Christmas day.

- **Something that lasts all year.** An inexpensive membership to local horticultural society affords you discounts at many good nurseries, plant exchanges, socializing, and the opportunity to hear good speakers throughout the year. A great stocking stuffer!

- **Something you can do together.** Treat someone to a trip to Canada Blooms, local home and garden shows and fairs or Seedy Sunday.

Finally, one of the most important gifts and one that could never be measured in dollars and cents, **the gift of time.** Consider certificates to either pledge personally or provide professional assistance to your favourite gardener.