



# HOME & GARDEN

HOME AND GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER • 12005 HOMEWOOD ROAD • ELLICOTT CITY, MD 21042 • 1-800-342-2507

## Ornamental Plant Tips - December 2008

### Culture

- **Annuals and Perennials** - This is a good time to save the seed from annual and biennial flowering plants like cleome, zinnias, cosmos, celosia and butterfly weed. Leave the flower heads on sunflowers, coneflowers, coreopsis and black-eyed susan to provide winter food for birds. Dahlia tubers, canna rhizomes, and Elephant Ear bulbs should be lifted and stored in sawdust or potting mix in a cool, dry location, like an unheated garage or unheated part of a basement, where temperatures will remain above freezing. Do not wash the soil off them with water, it can cause a rot problem in storage.
- **Bulbs** - Plant any leftover bulbs in the garden as long as the soil can be worked. Plant only solid, healthy bulbs. Discard bulbs that are shrunken, mushy or obviously not in good condition. The site for bulbs should be sunny, well-drained and ideally the soil should be well-amended with organic matter. Fertilize the planting area with a balanced fertilizer containing nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. If fertilizer is used it is not necessary to apply bonemeal. The strong organic odor of bonemeal sometimes attracts wildlife that may dig up the bulbs. Bulbs can be protected from animal pests by surrounding them with a wire mesh like chicken wire.
- **Holiday Plants** - If you plan on purchasing and then planting a live Christmas tree, you may want to dig the hole ahead of time when the ground is not frozen. For more tips, read HG46, "Selecting and Caring for a Live Christmas Tree". If you are purchasing a cut Christmas tree, read HG 45, "Selecting and Caring for a Cut Christmas Tree".
- For care of Poinsettias, see our publication HG30.

### Water Gardens –

If you did not cover your pond to prevent leaves from falling in, spend some time now to remove those leaves. The decomposing leaves will produce gases that when trapped under the ice will kill fish. Cover the pond with screen after its been cleaned. Consider buying a stock tank heater for small ponds to prevent them from freezing solid during the winter. Discontinue feeding your fish, although they might still eat some food they cannot properly metabolize food easily during cold weather. This can lead to sickness or death. Clean up pond statuary, fountains and other concrete or plastic pond features, remove them from the water and cover these items with plastic to prevent snow and ice damage. Bring pumps and filters indoors.

**Have a pest or gardening question? Call The Home and Garden Information Center  
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