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Keeping the Fire Lit

How not to go stir crazy at this time of year

You have the itch to get out there and garden right now, don't you? *That's because you can't.* Well, you can, but there's not much to do out there plant-wise. No planting or cultivating yet, people, and no turning of soil. But if you have a winter gardening itch, here are some ways to scratch it:

- **Force bulbs indoors.** It doesn't take much except some bulbs (try a hand full of paperwhites, an amaryllis or several fragrant hyacinths), some decorative gravel (try Ikea for great prices on tumbled stones or glass) and a shallow glass bowl (try Goodwill). Just pour a layer of gravel into your bowl, tuck in your bulbs (make sure they're root side down), then pour the rest of the gravel around your bulbs. Fill with water up to the base of the bulbs (not too high or they'll mold) and tuck in some moss. (Smith & Hawken at 26 N.W. 23rd Place has dreamy lime green moss.) Keep it happy in a light-filled window, and you'll soon have the scent of spring close by.

- **Feed the birds.** With suet, birdseed and, especially if you have over-wintering hummingbirds,



sugar water, the birds will definitely benefit from a little love this time of year.

- **Plant trees.** If you don't have trees of your own to plant, get involved with Friends of Trees with the added bonus of meeting your neighbors and fellow Portlanders while you dig, plant and mulch. (Bonus spaghetti feed afterward.)

- **Wait to do your pruning** until after Presidents Day weekend. You'll thank me when that bitter frost crunches in Feb. 9.

- **Stay off the soil.** Walking on water-logged soil at this time of year breaks down the good stuff and will harden your clay soil, making it unable to retain water this summer.

- **Sit tight** and do a little dreaming and planning. Some of my favorite seed and plant catalogs are *One Green World*, *Territorial Seed Company* and *High Country Gardens*. Mmm, new amaranth! Lots of juicy pretty things to look at.

- **Mark your calendars.** The garden shows that come in the bleakest time of year encourage us gardeners, "Just hang on, spring is around the corner." ☺



LEANN LOCHER
Growing an amaryllis indoors during the winter keeps a feisty gardener busy.

The PORTLAND YARD, GARDEN AND PATIO SHOW runs from Feb. 15 to 17 at the Oregon Convention Center, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

The NORTHWEST FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW runs from Feb. 20 to 24 at Washington State Convention and Trade Center, 800 Convention Place in Seattle. This is the mother lode.

LEANN LOCHER can be reached at sassygardener@gmail.com or on her gardening journal at www.sassygardener.com.

About Me

You may have noticed I'm not Dirty Dan, the previous *Just Out* gardening writer. Alas, he's gone on to other pastures, and lucky you, get me.

My partner likes to say she just digs the holes and I direct, but the reality is, we both like to work in our North Portland garden, and for me it's really a passion. Together we've eradicated our lawn and replaced it with a wildly out-of-control garden. I can be found at plant sales with my cart overflowing with new finds, and I love visiting the gardens of others.

I'm not a fan of traditional gardening rules and regulations found in a lot of garden writing. For me, gardening is fun, and you can just throw the rules out the window. If I want to plant edibles in my ornamental beds, so be it. And if the best light for vegetables is in our front yard, that's where the raised beds are going. If I want to plant a goth border of strange and unusual plants, I do.

Gardening is an adventure, a hobby, a creative outlet and something I'm avidly learning more about. I'm certainly not a professional (I'm working on my Latin pronunciation, but it ain't pretty), but my friends know how much I love to garden and ask me for advice. I gladly pass it on because that's just what gardeners do. And I suppose that's what this column will be: a place to pass along my discoveries, favorites, visits to gardens (hopefully lots of queer ones) and nurseries. Feel free to drop me a line with your questions; I'm sure I'll have some sort of sassy, and hopefully helpful, answer. ☺