

Diggin' In The Dirt: November is Downtime

By Kim Camarda

November for the gardener tends to be a downtime. We start to realize that the growing season and harvest are over and the mud is here. Beauty has to be seen in what's been left to go to seed. Plans for next year start. Remember the primrose and pansy can provide a nice variety of color for the winter season. The fragrant varieties are a nice winter surprise. Both are very cold tolerant. For winter fragrance and bloom, I especially like the *Sarcococca ruscifolia* in the winter. Sometimes called sweetbox, it is an evergreen shrub with waxy oblong leaves and miniscule white flowers that waft in the cold winter air. It's quite a fragrant surprise when most

things smell of dirt and evergreens.

Reduce fertilizer applications to your houseplants and frequently check them for bugs. Sticky residue, fluffy white powder and anemic-looking plants are all signs that you may have trouble. Often, a mild soapy water will rid your houseplants of many indoor pests.

For color and a reminder of spring, you can force spring bulbs for indoor blooms in December through February. Good choices for winter flowering are tulips, narcissus (daffodils), hyacinths, crocus, scillas, grape hyacinths, and lily of the valley can be forced into flower in late winter and early spring. A pot of tulips on the window sill in February can bring a smile to any gardener's

face. An easy way to grow your paperwhites or hyacinths is to place them in a bowl with a few stones anchoring the bulbs then add enough water to reach the base of the bulbs, keep it filled to this level. Keep your paperwhites and hyacinths in a cool spot until they have rooted, then move them to a sunny window. For blooms throughout the colder months, pot your bulbs one week apart then move them out as they start.

For indoor winter amaryllis, place the root area of the amaryllis bulb in lukewarm water for a short while so that it gets a good shot of moisture before potting. Next, plant it in a good quality potting soil at a depth where only the top of the bulb is showing. Amaryll-

is should be kept at room temperature and will require more watering once the leaves begin to grow.

Once the flowers are finished and the stem begins to die back, you can cut them off and store them in a cool dark place. Be sure to keep information on the amaryllis types you purchase as some bloom only every second year.

As with anything in nature, results can and will vary. You can do everything right and it can still go wrong. The surprise of gardening is what makes us try again and again. Sometimes research will give you information that is contradictory. You just have to stick with what works for you and expand on that.

Barnyard News: Caring For Your Horse In Winter

Horses usually adapt easily and quickly to winters; but it's important to provide a little extra care during the colder winters we periodically have here-- especially the older, the younger and the health challenged horses

Don't forget to get a pre-winter dental check-up. If your horse isn't grinding up food properly, he may not be getting all the nutrients and energy out of the food that he needs. Food is energy and energy creates warmth! Remember to check and keep the hooves in good condition, too. Well-trimmed hooves will chip less, hold less snow, and provide better grip on slippery ground.

As pasture quality or accessibility decreases, increase hay. The best heat source for your horse is extra hay. During the cold weather, it's better to increase the amount of hay than it is concentrated feeds. Hay is digested in the cecum and colon which results in heat production by bacterial fermentation. If you

are unsure of what to safely feed your horse, talk with your veterinarian so you don't give your animal something that may cause him or her to colic.

Consider blanketing during wet, very windy, or frigid weather. Like a wet down jacket, your horse's haircoat loses its effectiveness and won't hold body heat when it's wet. Older horses, horses unused to the cold or clipped horses will need blanketing. Remove the blanket every day and brush your horse, checking for chafing and irritation from the blanket. Don't neglect grooming during the winter. A dirty, matted coat loses much of its ability to insulate. Even if you put your horse in a stall during very cold weather, keep in mind it may still need blanketing. In the wild, horses forage, move continually and huddle together during cold weather to keep body temperatures up. These options are not available to a stalled horse and body temperatures can decline.

Inside the barn, consider weather-strip-

ping the stalls. Horses kept in air-tight stalls can develop respiratory problems, and direct drafts are a health hazard as well this time of year. Make sure the stalls are well-ventilated and ammonia from urine does not build up.

If your stall floors are cement, add rubber matting or extra bedding for insulation. There are many different types of bedding and floor products available. If they are on mud/dirt floors, keep them dry by rerouting the water in the first place. Do not expect a horse to stand ankle-deep in mud and remain healthy. I have also heard and read that a geotextile fabric (aka cow carpet) can be used over the dirt. Horses need to have a dry area to get into-- this will keep their hooves and legs healthier and less prone to diseases, bacteria and fungus.

Be sure to provide adequate water during the winter. Horses may not drink enough if the water is very cold. Try to keep the water temperatures as far above freezing as possible to increase water consumption and avoid dehydration. Heated buckets are an option for very cold or freezing nights. Watch for frozen puddles around the water troughs. These can be really dangerous to your horse. Sprinkle alfalfa meal on the icy spots. Alfalfa contains nitrogen to promote melting and has a texture to provide traction. Non-toxic and cheap! Fireplace ashes and plain old dirt can provide traction, too.

If you have concerns about your horse or other animals, you should always consider consulting with your veterinarian.

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