

By Susan Brackney, a *Hobby Farm Home* contributing editor and passionate gardener



WINTER

- Make sure protective tree wraps haven't come loose, and check perennial beds for frost heaving. Add extra wood chips or straw to protect very shallow root systems.
- To make sure the compost pile remains active, turn it periodically and keep it about as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- After heavy snows, remove excess loads from ornamental shrubs and trees to prevent branch damage.
- Check storage potatoes, pumpkins and squash for spoilage. Toss potatoes that are sprouting or look shriveled, soft or green. Never allow individual pumpkins or squash to freeze or touch one another.
- Force bulbs or early-flowering branches indoors for a little color.
- Create next year's garden calendar. Include frost dates, expected plant shipments, seed-sowing schedules, farm market meetings, etc.
- Check seed-starting heat mats for cracks or breaches, and repair with electrical tape or replace them altogether. Make sure fluorescent lamps still work. Sanitize last season's pots, seedling packs and flats.
- Inspect opened fertilizers, insecticides and rooting hormones for leaks, crystallization or spoilage.
- Pay farmers' market fees, and plan next year's booth.
- Test seed-stock germination rates; if germination is poor, add that seed variety to your list of seeds to buy in the spring.