



December/January

University of California Cooperative Extension

Welcome to Nutrition BEST Gardening! At Nutrition BEST, we're working to make healthy food and healthy lifestyles available to everyone. In this newsletter, you will find projects, ideas, and resources for gardening with kids of all ages, even the very youngest. **Let's grow together!**

Project of the Month: Make a Birdseed Wreath

In the wintertime, it can be hard for wild birds to find food. Help out our feathered friends and attract wild birds to your yard by making a pretty birdseed wreath to hang outdoors. You could also use cookie cutters to make smaller birdseed "biscuit" ornaments to give as gifts to family and friends!

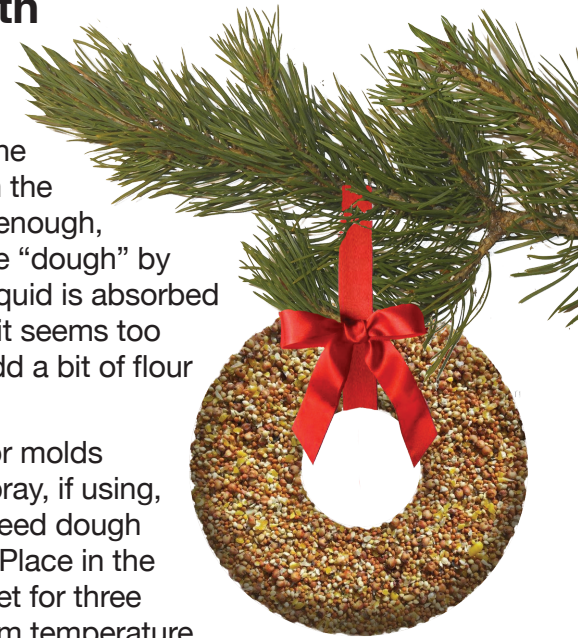
You will need:

- 2 cups birdseed
- 2 tablespoons cold water
- Boiling water
- One packet of unflavored gelatin
- Cooking spray (optional)
- Small Bundt pans, ring molds, pie pans, or other decorative molds or cookie cutters
- Ribbons for hanging

1. Place gelatin powder in a large heatproof bowl, add 2 tablespoons of cold water, and allow to sit for a few minutes while you bring a pot or kettle of water to the boil. Add 6 tablespoons boiling water (a grownup's job!) and stir until gelatin is completely dissolved.

2. Next, stir in the birdseed. When the mixture is cool enough, kids can mix the "dough" by hand until the liquid is absorbed by the seed. (If it seems too soft, you can add a bit of flour to the dough.)

3. Spray pans or molds with cooking spray, if using, and press the seed dough into the molds. Place in the refrigerator to set for three hours, or at room temperature for 24 hours. Turn the shapes out of the pans and allow to dry for a day before adding ribbon loops to hang the wreaths. Hang outdoors, preferably in a spot protected from rain, and enjoy watching the visitors to your yard!



In The Garden: December & January

Mulch around perennials to protect roots from frost damage. Cover the ground around your plants with a four-inch layer of dry leaves, straw, or compost.

Winter is a great time for building projects! How about adding a raised bed or compost bin to your garden? Look online for plans, check out library books, or talk to your local Master Gardeners.

Check container plants for water needs; even though it's the rainy season, cold weather and frost can dry out soil quickly.

Start planning out next year's garden! Kids can help out by drawing a map of your garden area. Talk about what kinds of plants you could grow, where you would put them, and what new plants you'd like to try this year.

Gardening Fun: Winter Gardening Projects for Kids

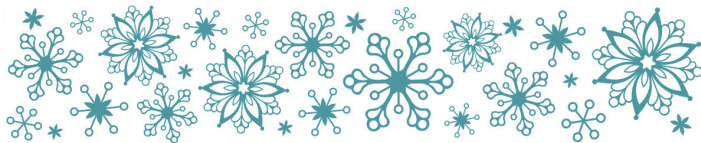
It may be cold and rainy outside, but don't let that stop you from gardening! Here are some fun projects and activities to try indoors during the winter months.

Windowsill planting: Lettuce, baby greens, and herbs are all easy to grow on a sunny windowsill. Try using recycled containers like yogurt cartons and milk jugs (don't forget to poke some drainage holes in the bottom!) Fill with damp potting soil or seed-starting mix. Plant seeds according to package directions, water well, and cover with plastic wrap to keep the soil moist until the seeds sprout. Place on a warm, sunny windowsill where kids can check daily and watch the plants grow.

Seed sorting: this is a good activity to help young children develop observation and fine motor skills. Mix a few kinds of seeds together in a bowl — try beans, peas, popcorn kernels, and pumpkin seeds from the pantry, or add smaller herb seeds like coriander or peppercorns for a challenge. Provide kids with an egg carton or small dishes to sort and separate the seeds.

Watch seeds sprout: This usually happens underground, where we can't see it, but you can sprout seeds in a jar and watch as they grow! Fill a glass or plastic jar with damp paper towels. Tuck bean or pumpkin seeds around the outside, so they are visible through the glass. Put the lid on and set the jar in a warm place. In a few days, the seeds will start to sprout!

Read a book together: Visit your local library and ask for recommendations for children's books and stories about gardening. Make some hot chocolate, find a cozy blanket, and it's storytime! What better way to spend a rainy afternoon together?



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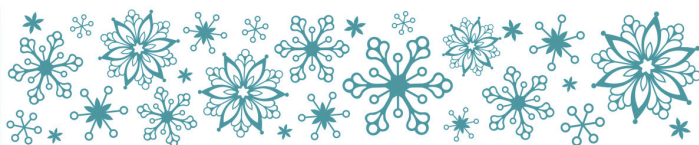
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Did You Know?

Vanilla extract flavor comes from the pod of an orchid, *Vanilla planifolia*.

Poinsettias first grew wild in Mexico. They were brought to the United States in 1825 by Joel Poinsett, the first U.S. minister to Mexico, and were named after him.

Cranberries are one of just 3 major fruits native to North America. Blueberries and Concord grapes are the other two.



Recipe: Kale and Apple Salad

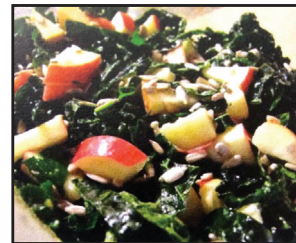
Yield: 4 servings

Time: 30 minutes

This salad is a delicious way to introduce even picky eaters to kale! The sweet apples and crunchy sunflower seeds add extra color and flavor. Kids can help massage the greens and toss the salad. Flat-leaf types like Lacinato or Dinosaur Kale are especially tender and good for this dish.

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch kale, stalks removed and leaves sliced into strips
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt, to taste
- 2 tablespoons honey
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 apple, diced (about 1 cup)
- Small handful of sunflower seeds



Directions:

1. In a large bowl, mix kale, half of the lemon juice, a drizzle of oil, and salt. Massage until the kale starts to soften and wilt, 2-3 minutes. Set aside while you make the dressing.
2. In a small bowl, whisk remaining lemon juice with the honey and black pepper. Drizzle in remaining oil while whisking. Taste the dressing to be sure it has a balanced flavor. Pour dressing over kale and add the apples and sunflower seeds. Let sit in refrigerator for at least 20 minutes and toss again before serving.

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