



This Month in the Garden...

by Peggy Koppmann

The only good thing about February is that it leads to March. By now, we've had enough of winter and there are still 28 days to get through till the calendar changes. Maybe the weather gods will shine upon us with some much-needed sunshine to remind us that spring is coming. On the upside, February is also Chocolate Lover's Month, and I, for one, intend to celebrate all month long!

Retail Therapy – Cabin fever can be relieved in February by a few visits to nearby nurseries for a walk through the greenhouses and a search for new houseplants to add to your collection. Look for plants that don't mind the lower humidity and sunlight our homes generally offer. Low to medium light choices include Peperomia in all its many forms and Aglaonema species commonly called Chinese evergreens. (Please exercise care here as "Chinese evergreens" are toxic to dogs and cats.) For bloom, consider the stand-bys – African violet, Streptocarpus and Anthurium. Go for the exotic with Goldfish plant, Lipstick plant, or Shrimp plant. Look for Silver Vase plant or other bromeliads for lasting color and great interest. Of course, those of you who want the ultimate low-maintenance plant may consider Tillandsia. Many stores and nurseries have mid-winter houseplant sales, but be careful to protect plants carefully when bringing them home.


Growing Therapy – Most seed starting should wait a few weeks, but slow growers such as celery, leeks, and onion transplants need 10-12 weeks of growth indoors before planting in the garden. Small-seeded flowers such as wax begonias and

petunias, Verbena, stocks, wallflower, and Ageratum also need a longer head-start. Check to be sure you are using a sterile seed-starting mix, (not potting soil), and that your containers have been cleaned and sterilized properly. Little tiny growing things will make February pass more quickly.

Inspiration Therapy – February can bring time to look for new sources of inspiration and information. Subscribe to a new gardening magazine or spend some time browsing Buffaloniagaragardening.com for ideas and information. Join a garden club or attend one of their programs listed in the Friday Buffalo News. Sign up for a lecture or workshop such as Master Gardeners Education Day and Communities in Bloom, (erie.cce.cornell.edu). Browse gardening books in your public library. Organize a lending library of gardening books with other gardeners from your own collections. And for full-scale inspiration, take a look at the great selection of plants offered in the Botanical Gardens Great Plant Sale pre-sale, (buffalogardens.com), and get a head start on planning this year's garden.

Planting Therapy – Re-purpose a small fish tank, purchase one of those very cool glass houses found at nurseries, or just find a pretty glass container to begin a terrarium. Open containers are best for succulents or cacti, while closed containers are best for tropical and houseplants. Start with a layer of pebbles, then a layer of activated charcoal before adding the appropriate soil mix. Some folks recommend using coir rather than soil, depending on the plants you are using. Decide where the terrarium will be displayed in order to guide you plant selection, (sun exposure, moisture

requirements). Choose plants that are slow-growing to avoid them taking over the available space. Read up on the care and maintenance of terrariums as the sunlight/moisture/humidity balance can be tricky. Both gardeners.com and inhabitat.com have excellent information to help you get started and to brighten your February days.

And then – Check on bulbs you planted for forcing; make sure your tender perennials are still covered with mulch, cut some forsythia branches for indoor forcing; check for ice and snow damage to shrubs and trees; buy flowers or a plant for someone for Valentine's Day and support our local florists; finish your seed orders; inventory your garden and seed-starting supplies; check hemlocks for wooly adelgid. 



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