

## Outdoor Chores for a Warm Winter Day

By Susan Camp

December 21<sup>st</sup> is the date of the 2025 Winter Solstice, and we can anticipate ten or more weeks of dreary, cold, possibly sleety or snowy weather after that. What are we going to do until the end of February to keep from slipping into the winter doldrums? Sitting around in our pajamas, sipping tea and binge-watching old sit-coms, true crime, and “reality” shows is one option, but I would rather be outside, especially on temperate days.

On the Middle Peninsula, we will have many pleasant days with temperatures warm enough to complete chores we didn't finish before Thanksgiving.

With the soil temperature down to 55 to 60°F, now is the perfect time to plant a bed or border of daffodil or tulip bulbs. Jim and I add some new cultivars every year. The cheerful blooms will refresh us in the spring.

On a day when the air temperature is between 55 to 60 °F, pull out a paintbrush and give a fresh coat to mailbox posts and decorative gateposts. Other small painting and repair jobs abound once you begin looking for them. Our potting shed has just been repainted and looks like new.

On a warm day, repair or replace broken fence posts and rails and grape or rose arbors. A chilly winter day is a good time to reset stones bordering the driveway, parking area, or flower beds.

If you have woods, it is easier to see which dead or diseased trees need to be removed when they are bare of leaves. Hauling the debris out of the woods is easier when you don't have to fight the underbrush. Unwanted English ivy, vinca, Japanese honeysuckle, and other invasive species are less difficult to remove during the winter when the plants are dormant, and there are few chiggers and mosquitoes to pester you. Ticks will still be around, though.

Take stock of garden ornaments and furniture. Which pieces can be sanded and repainted, and which ones are beyond repair? Is it time to buy new Adirondack chairs? Does your garden gnome need a new coat of paint? Have the children or grandchildren outgrown the playhouse? Are you going to leave it in that condition, or fix it up as craft, hobby, or writing space for a new phase in your creative life?

Two years ago, Jim and I removed our granddaughter's playhouse, and turned the site into “Emma's Garden,” a charming brick terrace furnished with two bright turquoise Adirondack chairs and a small yellow table. The terrace is bordered by azaleas, daffodils, and a “New Dawn” rose, trained on an old metal twin bed headboard and footboard, a thrift store find that we spray-painted bright turquoise. Young redbud trees frame one corner of the garden. The little terrace is an inviting place to sit on summer afternoons.

A warm, winter day is a good time to de-clutter the potting shed. Clean and repair hand tools; sand and paint handles; sharpen blades. Throw away broken tools and pots, and check expiration dates on garden pesticides and fertilizers. Set aside old or unused chemicals for disposal on the next hazardous material disposal day. If you separate the chemicals in advance, dropping them off at the collection center will be a simple task.

Install bird feeders and provide seeds, nuts, suet, and water for our winged friends. Make peanut butter and birdseed pinecone feeders with the grandchildren. On cold days, you can watch the birds while you sit by the fire. Install bluebird boxes for spring visitors.

Sometimes gardening is hard, dirty work that seems never ending. We don't always reap the hoped-for rewards, and we dread and delay completing chores that seem like drudgery. If we complete some of the clean-up and repair jobs on pleasant winter days, we can focus on our plans for spring planting during the frigid, snowy ones, with plenty of time to drink tea and watch reruns.