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A Year in the Garden- a What to Do When, Chore List
(Don't groan! It's fun! It's healthy exercise!)

Jan-Feb: Sit inside by the fire and read garden books, magazines and seed catalogs. Start looking for evidence of life to keep you going! Review your notes from last year - plan the changes you want to make in the garden. Make a list of new plants you want to try this year.

March: Start cleaning up debris- leaves, twigs, trim back perennials to any green part, trim back ornamental grasses as far down to the ground as possible. All this material along with kitchen waste like coffee grounds, eggshells, vegetable & fruit scraps goes on the compost pile. Start seeds under grow lights.

April: Plant cold weather lovers like pansies, lettuce, broccoli, and some of the Proven Winner annuals that tolerate cold (ask!). Spread *Plantone*, or the organic fertilizer of your choice, on flowerbeds. Turn over soil in vegetable garden. Continue adding to compost pile. Perennials, shrubs, and trees are all safe to plant. (A good rule of thumb is- if you see it outside at Smith's Acres, it's staying outside at night, and is therefore safe to plant). April is a great month to dig and divide perennials that are big enough to split in half. This is a great opportunity to share and trade with other gardeners.

May: The farmer's rule of thumb for "safe planting" date is after the last full moon in May- then you can generally plant all annuals and "temperennials". One word of caution - plants like tomatoes, basil, eggplant, and peppers really like warm night temperatures and will sit in the ground shivering even if there's no frost, so watch the weather. They usually grow faster if planted closer to Memorial Day when the ground has warmed up. Spread compost around the base of plants to discourage weeds and maintain moisture.

June: Perennial planting month - add flowering perennials to the gaps in your garden. Once a week, pull weeds, trim dead flowers ("Deadheading"), and add this plus kitchen waste to compost pile.

July & August: Be sure to cut a nice bouquet each week, and start harvesting your early vegetables. The biggest chores are keeping plants and containers watered. Containers will need to be checked on a daily basis. New plants in the garden need extra watering during heat and drought. It's a good rule to water long and deeply less frequently than a little every day. Morning watering is preferred to evening to discourage the spread of fungus. Keep up the routine of once a week pulling weeds and deadheading. Add some extra fertilizer to containers - remember, the only nutrients contain grown plants receive, they get from you.

September: Harvest, harvest, harvest. Can and freeze all you can and share the extra with your friends and neighbors. Add fall bloomers and ornamental grasses to round out your garden.

October: This is another great time of year to divide perennials. It's also a good time to move things that are not in the right spot, It's still a good time to plant perennials and shrubs, but be sure to add a nice thick layer of mulch to help keep the ground warmer while their roots are getting established. Now is the perfect time to plant spring flowering bulbs like daffodils, tulips, and crocus.

November: Time to clean up and put the garden "to bed"- cut back perennials to wherever you see green unless the plants have interesting seed heads (Sedum, Purple coneflower, Black-eyed Susan and Astilbe all look kind of cool in the winter and offer seeds for the birds). Ornamental grasses are great for winter texture and for shrubs, things that stay evergreen or have interesting bark like Red twig Dogwood make the garden less dreary in the winter. This is a good time to top dress your mulch around your established plants to keep the ground insulated. Ideally, mulch when ground is frozen so that it stays frozen- that way plants won't get damaged from freezing and thawing. Many gardeners suffer the most damage from deer from Nov into early spring because the does are pregnant and hungry, so consider using a repellent on special plants, or use some netting.

December: Clean out containers and store in a protected place for winter. Put up some holiday decorations and relax.