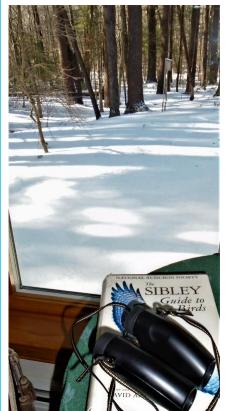# Garden Club
Horticultural Hints
February 2022
What's a little snow or ice? This is New England!

A good deed now will pay dividends later. Feeding birds allows you to enjoy them now from inside. And when spring arrives, it means you have encouraged them to look for dinner in your yard. Eating insects, weed seeds and adding interest to your landscape is how they will repay you this spring and summer. To further your own education on who is in your yard, purchase a bird guide book (such as Sibley's or Audubon) and keep it handy by a window

One of the hardest things for birds in the winter is the lack of water. While putting out seeds and suet certainly helps, a shallow container of water birds can drink from is vital. If you don't have a heated bird bath, put out fresh water for the birds each morning in a sunny location. It may freeze during the day, but the birds in your garden will have had the chance to get a very important drink before it does

Liquid water is scarce in February, but no less vital for the birds in your neighborhood. If a heated birdbath isn't practical, put out fresh water in a shallow bowl, choosing a sunny location to keep it from freezing for a longer period.

Clear snow around small trees to make it harder for rodents to eat the bark. On a warm day (about 40 degrees), **spray deer repellents** on the evergreens that the deer eat. As they get hungrier, deer become less fussy about what's on the menu, but a mouthful of repellent may send them to another area.

Deer damage is preventable, but you have to keep up the spraying to keep it effective.

Time to prune. Now is the time to do your pruning of any plant that does NOT flower in the spring. Trees and shrubs are dormant, meaning the cold weather and short days have shut down many of their activities. (Don't think of your plants as active? They are when they are growing leaves and new branches, setting flowers, making fruit or employing their defenses against insects and disease!)

Pruning now allows the wounds to dry and begin the healing process before spring begins. Use common sense when pruning. Never prune above your head — think where that branch is likely to fall. Always wear heavy gloves to protect your fingers. Use only sharp tools, they will make the work faster, easier and less tiring. And never prune while standing on a ladder — that's for professionals.

Take advantage of days when it is above freezing to spray dormant oil on your fruit and nut trees. Dormant – also called horticultural – oil is harmless to birds and bees. It coats and smothers egg masses of damaging insects. It must be applied before leaves start to open, so February and March provide the best window for their use.

Caterpillars feasted on the leaves of this Amelanchier (shadbush) two years ago. Last winter, beginning in early February, the tree was given a spray of horticultural oil every three weeks. The egg masses were smothered by the oil and never hatched. There is no sign of an infestation this winter.

Extra care for houseplants.   Think about your houseplants from their point of view: Your home is warm but there is little humidity, and sometimes hot air blows over you. The sunlight coming through the windows is very weak in February. You may be left in the hands of plant sitters who over-water or under-water and forget to give you a quarter turn every week so you don't start to lean into the window, where you could get frostbite.

If you are responsible for the plants in your house, remember they need care, especially in winter. Give your plants a shower in the sink or tub to remove dust and grime that lands on leaves, spray them weekly or set them on pebbles with water below the pot to increase humidity in your home. Water only sparingly until growth begins again. And for plant's sake, don't fertilize until they have more sun (or artificial light) to make use of fertilizer.