



In the Deep Midwinter

February is neither here nor there for gardeners. Too cold to work outside, too soon to start any seeds except the really slow germinators. The Christmas cactus and amaryllis are over, poinsettias are looking peaky, and the other house plants are mostly slumbering in the still-too-short days. So it seems appropriate to have an odds-and-ends article this month.

- Have you checked out our club website? Thanks to the hard work and talent of K.C. Alexander, the website won a NATIONAL award this year from the Federated Garden Clubs of America. K.C. updates the site after every event with a slideshow of new photos. We're proud of our contributions to Haddam and love to share them with you. www.haddamgardenclub.org.
- Last year the club took responsibility for the Horticulture and Floral Design segment of the Haddam Neck Fair. This year, we're adding a new design award: the Susan Ritty Blue Ribbon for the best bouquet, honoring our much-loved longtime club member and former president. (You *are* planning to enter this year, aren't you? It's never too soon to start thinking about what you'll have in bloom on Labor Day weekend.)
- One of the many gardens we maintain for the town is the butterfly garden on the north side of the building. Until recently, thirsty butterflies had to make do with a mud puddle, but they've gone upscale. Moodus stone mason Dwayne Perreault hand carved a rock basin, just deep enough to suit small creatures. He gave it to Susan and Richard Nygard of Chester, who in turn generously donated it to the butterfly garden. Check it out next time you're at the library.
- Looking for an antidote to February's grey skies? Mark your calendar for the annual [Flower and Garden Show](#) at the CT Convention Center, February 20-23. This year's Horticulture section is inspired by Connecticut's historic gardens, including the one behind our very own Thankful Arnold House.
- Make February a month for the birds! Without leaving home, you can participate in the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#). From Valentine's Day through the 17th, spend just 15 minutes counting the birds outside your back door, and report your findings online. Citizen participation is invaluable to help scientists get a snapshot of migration patterns, which species are doing well and which struggling, and the impact of climate changes. The more reports, the better the data, so ask your friends and your kids to give it a try. (It's a great project for

schools, scouting or church groups.) You can count just one day or all four days. Let's put Haddam birds on the map!

- And while the birds are on your mind, cruise over to the [CT Audubon Society website](#) for a list of [upcoming webinars](#). The topics are all related to conservation, with a special focus on maintaining a healthy habitat for birds, so they cover everything from wetlands to forests to bird-safe buildings.
- Well, this didn't start out to be a bird-centric blog, but I'll add a few words about feeding birds. If you put out seed, you probably already know it's important to be consistent, and continue to supply food throughout the winter and well into spring. Don't forget to supply water. Cleanliness is important too; less of an issue at this time of year, but in warmer months dirty feeders can spread disease. Birds burn a lot of energy staying warm in winter, so try to provide oil-rich seeds, like sunflowers (and if you're wondering why grass won't grow under your birdfeeder, it's because sunflower seeds are allelopathic, meaning they send out chemicals that suppress germination of competing seeds). Possibly the most important thing to know about bird food, though, is the fact that baby birds can't eat seeds. Their only food is soft-bodied insects and caterpillars. In our part of the world, the best host plant for bugs, by far, is our native white oak. With so many oaks dead and dying, it's even more important that we bolster the birds' remaining supply of suitable food by planting natives and avoiding pesticides.

Finally, Happy Valentine's Day! Roses are red...but they are also grown with lots of pesticides and flown in from halfway around the world. Consider giving your love a living Valentine in the form of a tree. It could be planted far away to help reforest a national park damaged by fire or other natural disaster (visit the [Arbor Day Foundation](#) for ideas), or planted in your back yard to replace the native white oak or sugar maple you had to cut down last year. What could be a more fitting testament to your affection?

"He that plants trees loves others beside himself." (Thomas Fuller)