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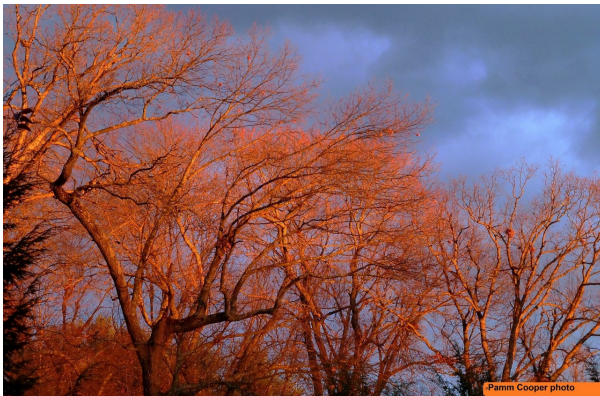
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## February is For Winter Sunsets, Birkin Philodendron, and Horned Larks





## Winter Sunsets



Because the air is drier in winter in the north, sky colors are more vibrant. Pollution is

also less in colder air temperatures, so this also makes colors more vibrant. In the northern latitudes in fall and winter the sun angles are lower so there is more atmosphere for the light to travel through. During this time the shorter wavelengths (blues, yellows, and greens) are scattered out, and the longer wavelengths get through instead (reds and oranges). Check out the sky just before the sun sets, especially when the sky is gray to the east for this type of orange “glow”. It lasts for only a moment and is gone.

## [The Colors of Sunset and Twilight](#)

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### **Birkin Philodendron**



This non-climbing Philodendron hybrid has distinctive glossy green leaves with bold, white pinstripes that really make the plant stand out in the indoor landscape. A slow growing member of the *Araceae* plant family, it is a tropical plant and needs a warm and humid environment indoors. A mutant form of a cultivar, Birkin was once quite rare and expensive. Variegation is somewhat unstable so leaves can appear on the same plant at the same time in any number of color variations. Grow in bright indirect light, not in direct sun.

## [Popular Philodendrons](#)

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### **Horned Larks - *Eremophila alpestris***

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Image: Christoph Moning

Horned Larks are songbirds that are found in fields, deserts, and tundra. They can be found in Connecticut during the winter where fields have exposed vegetation where there is no snow cover. Widespread, they are in decline over the last 50 years. Currently, there is a large flock in the upper pastures of UConn's Horsebarn Hill. Look carefully for movement where snow has melted, as they blend in with the ground. They scare easily and will fly together further away from disturbances like people or dogs walking. Males have two black horns of small feathers on their heads, a black mask and yellow on their throat and head.

### [Horned Larks](#)

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**NOW IS THE TIME TO PRUNE APPLE AND PEAR TREES**



Although there's not too much going on in the garden this time of year, the best time to winter prune apple and pears trees is right around the corner in February and March. Here are some fact sheets on when and how to prune:

[UMass Extension Fruit Program - Apple Tree Training and Pruning](#)

[UNH Extension - Growing Fruit: Training and Pruning Young Apple and Pear Trees](#)

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## Ice Patterns



This winter there were very unusual patterns in the ice on Ferguson Reservoir in Manchester, Connecticut. Warm weather kept ice from developing until late December and the ice was not thick. The water had a fair amount of green algae, so the thin ice layer that developed had a greenish tint. Cracking developed as temperatures warmed, but the cracks did not go completely through to the water below. The result was a mosaic pattern of angular cracks. By the next day, these were gone.

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## **Plant Highlight - Agave Leaf Imprints**

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Agave leaf buds are tight to each other and often the teeth of leaves are imprinted on the leaf right next to them. This is called bud imprinting, and it occurs on other plants as well, especially succulent plants with tight leaf buds. Note the patterns of teeth in the imprinting on plant shown. This makes the plant far more interesting in appearance and texture. The gray color of the leaves makes the bright maroon teeth along the leaf margins stand out.

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## Bird Highlight - Barred Owl



Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) have brown eyes, unlike other owls in the northeast that have yellow eyes. They can often be seen roosting or sleeping by day not too high up in tree branches especially in woods near a water source. In the winter they hunt either in the day or at night, usually preying on small rodents and other mammals. They will wade to grab frogs and fish.

### [Barred Owl](#)

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# KNOWLEDGE TO GROW ON - Read our latest Ladybug blogs

[Overwintering Dahlias](#)

[Fearless Pruning](#)

[Plentiful Plants](#)



Sugar and red maple trees will be tapped soon. Buckets are the old school method, but a maple vacuum tubing collection system can also be used. Late February to early March is generally when the maple sap is collected. Since this winter has not been very cold the sap flow from some trees may have begun early.

## [How to Tap a Maple Tree](#)

### UConn Speakers Featured at this Year's Flower Show

Thursday February 23, 11 a.m. Dawn Pettinelli "Successful Seed Starting"

Friday February 24, 12:30 Pamm Cooper "Good Bug, Bad Bug or Benign Bug?"

Saturday February 25, 12:30 Dennis Tsui "Low Light Houseplants!"

Sunday, February 26, 11: a.m. Dr. Nick Goltz "Houseplant Diagnosis"





**If we do not get much snow, we may have to get by using some other kind of material...**

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## 2023 February Gardening Tips

Mark your calendars for the [CT Flower & Garden Show](#), February 23 – 26 at the CT Convention Center in Hartford. Bring a ½ cup of soil for free pH testing and test our knowledge with your garden questions.

Start small-seeded flowers such as begonias and petunias.

Plant leek and onion seeds now. They need 10 to 12 weeks of growth before going in the garden.

Surprise your favorite sweetheart or friend with a floral bouquet on St. Valentine's Day.

Recent temperature swings may cause perennials to heave out of the ground. Gently push them back into the soil or cover with mulch.

When buying houseplants in winter, be sure to wrap them well for the trip home and,

if possible warm up the car. This prevents the foliage from freezing and protects tropicals from drafts.

Continue to clean leaves of large and smooth leaved houseplants like dracaena, [philodendron](#), ficus, etc.

To control [bagworm](#) on shrubs and trees, look for the small stick-covered bags and remove them by hand.

When using salt to melt ice on walks and driveways, spread it carefully to avoid damage to lawns. Consider using sand or sawdust instead. After the snow melts, flush the area around the roots exposed to salt with fresh water.

February is a great time to build a birdhouse. The size of the entrance must be proportionate to the type of bird you want to attract. Provide a rough surface both inside and outside the entrance to facilitate access and egress. In addition, ventilation holes are important. Put up the birdhouse in the spring, placing it at least six feet off the ground to keep cats, raccoons, and other predators away. protective collar hung just below the birdhouse also deters unwelcome visitors.

Check out more [February gardening tips](#) on our website.

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## Food For Thought

Study from the University of Colorado Boulder shows gardening may help reduce cancer risk, boost mental health:

<https://www.colorado.edu/today/2023/01/05/scientific-reasons-you-should-resolve-start-gardening-2023>

**Start Slow Seeds:** If you plan to add slow-growing plants to your garden, February is the time to start them indoors. Onions, celery, pansies and petunias are just a few seeds that should be started very early for the best results.

**Keep Up on Compost:** There's never a time that you should call it quits with compost, and even in February it's important to turn the compost and adjust its content so it will be healthy and suitable for spring use.

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## Have Your Soil Tested for Macro & Micro Nutrients

Send your soil sample in for testing now. For details on submitting a sample, go to [soiltesting.cahn.uconn.edu](http://soiltesting.cahn.uconn.edu)

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**Our standard nutrient analysis (which includes pH) is \$15/sample. For all soil test pricing, see link below:**

**<https://soiltesting.cahnr.uconn.edu/price/>**

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## **WHAT WE DO AT THE UCONN HOME AND GARDEN EDUCATION CENTER**

**Plant, insect, plant disease identification and control options**

**Advise clients on plant selection and cultural requirements**

**Accept samples for diagnosis either by drop-off or mail**

**Present on gardening topics including IPM, pollinators, lawns, invasive plants and insects, landscaping and gardening with native plants, soils, compost, gardening to support bees, birds and wildlife, good bug/bad bug, and other topics**

**Staff a booth every year at the CT Flower and Garden Show - bring in your gardening questions and soil samples for free pH testing**

**Publish weekly blogs and a monthly newsletter. Please subscribe!**

**Publish fact sheets, newspaper, and magazine articles**

**Provide media support and publish a monthly e-letter for the Department of Plant Science**

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## **Helpful Links**

**[Home & Garden Education Center](#)**

**[UConn Plant Diagnostic Laboratory](#)**

# Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory

## Master Gardener Program

### UConn Master Gardener Classes

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*What.* Food, Health, and Sustainability.

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