

# Timely Turf Tips

February 2011

**It usually starts** with one plant. You are a non-gardener until your Valentine gives you an azalea. Or your mother brings over an African violet. Or you go to the hospital and come out with a spathophyllum. Much to your amazement the new plant doesn't die. In fact, it thrives. Encouraged, you buy another plant and then another. Soon, your personal living space has gotten a whole lot greener. House plants are good for us. They make our space look more like the outdoors. They bring spring and summer into our rooms in the dead of winter. They also make us healthier by giving off moisture and oxygen. But shhhhhhh...they're sleeping. Although we're gaining minutes of daylight everyday, there's still a ways to go until we get the kind of sunlight that wakes houseplants up from their long winter's nap. In the meantime, if you want to do something nice for those hibernating houseplants, see below.

## Houseplants

- A warm shower of water or dusting of large leaves will help discourage pests and allow more useable sunlight to the plant. Place large plants in the shower and let water run for a good 5 minutes.
- Wash your windows. Even if the glass looks clean, washing will let in LOTS more light.
- Check plants for salt build up. This is a crusty, white substance on the soil surface or white crusty stains on the inside of the pot. Scrap off the crusty salt buildup and then leach the soil by watering thoroughly. Wait 20 minutes and water thoroughly again. This helps dilute and wash the salts out of the soil.
- Winter Watering: Less is More. Most houseplants (a good 95%) detest wet soil in winter, and should be allowed to dry out completely between waterings. That's right—completely! (exception: citrus plants)
- Do not fertilize this month. It'd be like trying to force a bologna sandwich on someone who's sound asleep. Wait until your landscape wakes up outside to start feeding your 'inside' plants.

## Start planning for your vegetable and flower beds

- Winter sowing is a method of starting seeds outside now, in winter, using recycled materials and Mother Nature. It is incredibly easy and less expensive than buying from the nursery. <http://tinyurl.com/4kuvyus>
- Make your final wish list and order your seeds as soon as possible, especially those you need to start indoors or for winter sowing. Gather your planting materials while waiting for your seed order to arrive.
- Start seeds indoors February 1st for pansies; February 15th for fibrous begonias.

## For the Birds

- Keep your thistle feeders full to attract common and hoary redpolls that visit Minnesota some winters. How do these tiny Redpolls survive winters? <http://www.wbu.com/chipperwoods/photos/redpoll.htm>

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