



## Pumpkin Brook Organic Gardening, Inc.

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From my winter reading pile, some great garden and nature books:

*Reading the Forested Landscape*  
by Tom Wessels  
and his new companion volume  
*Forest Forensics*

*The Wild Garden*  
by William Robinson  
annotated by Rick Darke

*Heirloom Vegetable Gardening*  
by William Woys Weaver

*Music of the Birds*  
(with CD of

### Greetings,

Here are some musings as I look out on a snowy world:

We finally got our snow! I really enjoy the blanket of white as viewed from my windows, so calm and serene. Remember that snow protects plants from the extremes of both single digit or subzero temperatures and those balmy days in the 40s that inevitably follow.

Birds are flocking to my feeders, and I caught a hungry robin on the 'Winter Red' winterberry shrub at the front door. It devoured about two-thirds of the red berries so far, and will no doubt return to finish off the rest. Interestingly, the young hedge of 'Red Sprite' winterberry in the back yard has not been touched. I once read that the birds wait for several freeze-thaw cycles before finding these berries palatable.

### New Year's Resolutions - It's Not Too Late

If you are striving to make health and wellness a priority this year, why not consider incorporating gardening into your lifestyle as one way to help you get started. Aside from vegetables and flowers, gardeners can harvest a bounty of a different kind. General wellness can be "harvested" too. Gardening encourages you to...



- **Eat healthier:** A veggie garden produces healthy food that is in season and as local as you can get. Because you grow the vegetables yourself you will be more likely to eat them. You will also eat them at their freshest, thereby preserving vital nutrients.
- **Exercise:** Gardening forces your body to perform many different types of motor skills and use all the major muscle groups through various tasks such as pruning, planting, and digging. It has been proven to burn as many calories as the average aerobic workout. By increasing endurance, physical strength, mobility, and flexibility it can be effective at helping to prevent diseases like osteoporosis, obesity, and depression.
- **Be Creative:** Developing a garden is an art form and requires a certain amount of creativity and trial and error. You can let your imagination run wild, and in doing so, you will develop your creativity "muscles," helping you become more creative in other areas of your life too.
- **Develop Peace of Mind:** We live in a culture that bombards us with technology, assaults our senses with advertising and forces us into fast paced lifestyles. Gardening can be an antidote to all of this stress. It encourages us to get back into

birdsongs)  
by Lang Elliott

our bodies, take pleasure in sensory delights, slow down, and focus on the simple task at hand. This is a wonderful activity to practice with family or community. If done in this way, it can also reduce loneliness and enhance social connection.

- **Develop a Spiritual Connection with the Earth:** As a culture, we spend the majority of our time in office buildings, houses and cars. Yet we humans have a deep yearning to connect with the earth. We only need to spend a little bit of time in nature before our spirits realize "this is home." Gardening opens our eyes to natural processes and cycles that are alive in the soil, in the changing of the seasons, and in our own backyards.

We want to support you on your journey towards health and wellness. We offer garden coaching services to help you get started. We can help you identify existing plants in your garden, assess your needs and provide low maintenance plant suggestions.

If there are any design options to consider that would make gardening a more accessible or inviting option for you and your family now is the time to start thinking about it. Benches, pathways, raised beds, terracing, patios, and shaded spots for lounging are some components that can contribute to livable gardens. [Contact us](#) to talk more about options specific to your site.

Here's to 2012 being a healthy and active year ahead!

**Ice Melt  
Reminder**  
You can find environmentally-safe ice melt products for your walkways at Concord Lumber, Whole Foods Markets, and Russell's Garden Center.

### Time to Talk Seedlings...

Snow on the ground gives me time to plan and dream. I took advantage of unexpected free time during last weekend's storm to make a second pass through the pile of seed catalogues. So far, my orders include heirloom vegetable varieties plus plenty of colorful, long blooming annuals. Look for our complete seedling list in next month's newsletter, when you can place your order. Remember that we can do custom growing, too, and now is the time to speak up if there's something special that you want to add to your garden.



Priscilla in PBOG's greenhouse

### The Beauty of Birches

What could say "New England" more than a white barked birch tree? These native plants are usually tall, graceful specimens that prefer an edge-of-woods habitat. Passing through old fields in process of reverting to woods, birches march forth with rapid growth spurts to colonize available open areas. They may later be crowded out by



**Tower Hill Botanic Garden** has a lovely Winter Garden now in its second season that is positively stunning when surrounded by a layer of snow! You can view it from the comfort of a heated area. The adjoining Limonaia and Orangerie are filled with light, color and fragrance from tender tropical plants. Plan a visit [soon](#).

other native trees such as white pine, hemlock, oak or hickory. Surviving birch specimens often co-exist in the resulting woods, where they catch our eye with their stark white and black beauty. This is particularly so in winter.



Single trunk birch trees

Taxonomists may beg to differ, but I think of this woody birch as *Betula papyrifera*, or paper birch. A close relative is *Betula populifolia* (grey birch). Both will have smooth white bark covered in black lenticels (a corky growth admitting air to the trunk and branches). Some peeling of bark in thin strips will occur over time, hence the "paper" in the common name. Plants may be single or multi-stemmed. The cultivar 'Whitespire' is often found in nurseries.

Species such as river birch (*Betula nigra*) have peeling, curling, often pinkish-tinged bark that provides year-round interest. These trees are frequently sold in nurseries as clumping, multiple-trunked specimens. A dwarf version, 'Little King,' or alternately named 'Fox Valley,' is striking in smaller garden areas. These river birches tolerate wet areas well, and can also withstand periods of dryness.

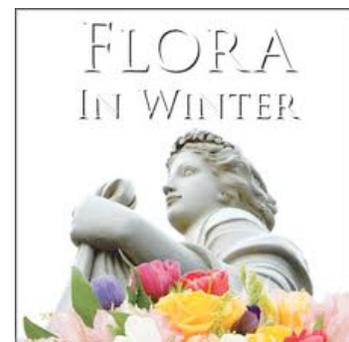
All birches have good yellow autumnal color. Their neither wide nor dense leaf canopy allows shrubs and perennials to thrive beneath. Seeds provide food for birds and are dropped on snow in winter like fine ground pepper. Disadvantages include a rather short life span, with trees maturing in 60 to 75 years and rarely surviving beyond 125 years. They bend easily to withstand ice and snow, but in extreme seasons may adopt a permanent lean or perhaps break.

The health of a birch tree can be maintained through proper siting. Birches prefer impoverished, well-drained soils and lack of planned irrigation (once established). Stressed older plants in the landscape respond well to light pruning (in late summer and fall) and to compost tea applications, putting out vigorous new growth. It's important to keep the weight of older branches in check to minimize potential damage during storms. Keep lawn maintenance equipment well away from their thin barked trunks!

So look for beautiful birches on your woodland walks and consider them as an interesting addition to the garden.

## January Is the Time for ....

- Looking, observing, note taking
- Reviewing seed catalogues
- Taking in a garden lecture or course at the [New England Wild Flower Society](#), [Tower Hill](#) or [Arnold Arboretum](#)
- Sharpening garden tools
- Ordering replacement tools
- Pondering design issues
- Brushing snow off young trees and shrubs with a corn broom to prevent breakage
- Rechecking the tree canopy for dangling



Jan 26-29 Winter Program at Tower Hill

Watch for our NEW electronic version of our **SPRING MAILING** coming to your e-mail soon!

broken branches from the October storm  
and planning removal if these threaten buildings, cars or people

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We are at work on an electronic version of our spring mailing which has traditionally been sent via US mail. So look for that next month.

**Sincerely,**  
Priscilla

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