February 2013 Hilltop Garden Tips

- Now is a great time to prune most trees and shrubs. However, do not prune azalea, dogwood, forsythia, redbud and rhododendron - they should be pruned after they bloom, since they set blooms in the fall. Almost anything that blooms after June 1 (except oakleaf hydrangea and late-flowering azalea cultivars) can be pruned safely now.
- Prune fruit trees and spray with Lime Sulphur and Dormant Oil to reduce insect and disease potential this summer.
- If you have peaches consider making an application of Copper (Hi-Yeild Bordeaux Mix or Bonide Liquid Copper) and a fungicide containing chlorothalonil to prevent Peach Leaf Curl. Once buds have swollen (late Feb to early March), infection will have occurred and prevention management is too late.
- If you had terrible insect problems in your vegetable garden this year, particularly grubs, squash vine borers, and other soil insects, tilling your garden in the winter can help to control them. Many of these insects burrow down in the ground and spend the winter in a larval stage. Tilling can bring them closer to the surface and low temperatures can help to kill them. Don't do this if the ground is too wet, but if the soil is workable, this can help to start the season off clean.
- Use wood ashes on your vegetable garden, bulb beds, lawn and non-acid loving plants if the pH of the soil is below 6.0. Apply very sparingly, 1 cup per square yard.
- Hardwood cuttings of many landscape plants like forsythia (yellow bells), flowering quince, weigela, crape myrtle, juniper, spirea and hydrangea can be taken this month.
- When doing winter cleanup in overgrown areas of the landscape, watch out for poison ivy. It will cause the same irritating rash even when handling dormant vines and roots. Never burn anything containing poison ivy material.
- Spray glysophate (Round-Up) on dormant Bermuda grass to kill winter weeds.
- Continue feeding the birds. They especially need suet in winter for warmth and energy. When using birdseed, remember that spilt birdseed will sprout, so keep out of beds or clean up beneath feeders.
- We can still get winter precipitation. Avoid salting sidewalks for damage can occur to plant material. Use alternative commercial products, sand or kitty litter for traction.
- Several insects, such as mites, gall forming insects, and aphids, have an overwintering stage which hide out on plants during the winter months in cracks and crevices of trunks and stems. On mild winter days, some of these insects may even become active. One way to keep their numbers in check is to spray once with horticultural oil during the winter.