

LIVE FREE OR DIG

Winter garden observations

BY MARY BINGMAN

Littleton Garden Club

At a point when gardens are finally resting, beds and borders still provide bits of interest and glimpses of adventure. Wintertime reveals details not shown in a busy growing season. Animal tracks, textures and tiny mysteries might appear in the frost or snow.

I'll mention a few ways that I like to explore a wintertime yard and growing area.

The natural beauty of branches and bark is more evident when leaves are gone. It's a perfect time to appreciate tree "foundations". Also fun to get caught off guard by a group of stubborn leaves on a cherry tree branch- tricked into imagining a male cardinal perched close by against all the whiteness!

- Dogwoods- certain varieties have bright red stems that stand out against the white of the snow. Red twig dogwood, also known as *Cornus sericea*, or Arctic Fire red dogwood both do well in our USDA zone 3.

- Ninebark or River birches- their bark can look very shaggy and interesting

- Old established tree trunks — moss and lichen can be plentiful and liven things up with vibrant green against the bark.

I get curious about who visits near our day lily border or the area down by the crab-apple tree. When there is a fresh layer of snow- it can be a fun time to boot up

and look for tracks.

- Possums have come around and they drag their tail and have soft, moving tracks.

- Moles and Voles duck between the low holly bushes (I see tiny paired prints). I am a little concerned that their tunneling will interfere with healthy root growth of my plantings there.

- Crows and Cardinals that landed near a pile of scattered birdseed shows "wing prints" where they settled.

- Deer are back! After an early snowfall, deer are moving & browsing again near the young false cedar trees. Their prints are unmistakable! Time to use deer repellent spray in between storms so that nibbling does not become rampant! We worked too hard to get the Arborvitaes to this growth stage.

- Bird Feeder "scraps." Our winter feeder is now up (we waited until most bears are in hibernation - Dec. 1 is suggested by NH fish and game). Many red and gray squirrel prints

exist as well as Tufted Titmice and Nuthatches. They leave tiny overlapping prints from doing "clean up duties" under the feeder.

All of those sightings are simple moments of pleasure and give me an excuse to be "out in nature," breathing cold, fresh air, far away from "screen-time."

Some naturalists keep interesting sketch notebooks to record animal activity or plant life over the winter. I have not done much journal keeping. I enjoy reading published naturalist journals and accounts instead. I previewed a new 2025 book at Barnes and Noble bookstore recently. "Sketching Nature: The Beginner's Guide to Keeping a Botanical Sketchbook" by Dianne Sutherland looks like a fine choice for individuals wishing to explore how to get creative with recording nature sightings.

Another good source is: "Drawn to nature" by Holly Ward Bimba from 2015. She is a watercolor artist from Virginia and creates many beautiful illustrations.

In this part of the season,

our wreath is decorated with pine cones and hung on our door. It can still be fun to gather additional pine cones and seed pods for centerpieces. Scavenging the ground for fallen cones and interesting curly twigs can be quick and fun. Boxwood shrubs provide interesting clippings to enhance a natural arrangement. Bringing "nature" inside keeps that connection to the garden and yard going.

We can all enjoy what nature has to offer beyond quiet and beauty as the garden sleeps on through the long winter season.

The Littleton Garden Club is dedicated to civic beautification, conservation and nature. Our club accepts new members from around the area and remains a very active group. To learn more visit our Web site at:

<https://www.littletonn-gardenclub.org>.

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Rozzie May