Christmas fern (Polystichum acrostichoides) is a shade-loving fern that stays attractive nearly all year round. It is an excellent choice for more manicured landscapes. The fronds are glossy green and make them an all-around garden favorite. They prefer partial shade, but can handle deeper shade and drier soils. Avoid direct sun as this will cause leaf burn. Christmas fern is a spreading plant, which makes it a good choice for areas where you want something to spread and fill in a space quickly. It’s also easy to propagate and can be used in a variety of garden settings, from borders to shade gardens.

Avoid direct sun as this will cause leaf burn. Christmas fern is a spreading plant, which makes it a good choice for areas where you want something to spread and fill in a space quickly. It’s also easy to propagate and can be used in a variety of garden settings, from borders to shade gardens.

Road salt and other winter de-icers have long been a hot topic among environmentally conscious gardeners, and for good reason. Some de-icing products can cause direct damage to plants. These products can also runoff from walkways with rain and snow melt. This can create salty and nutrient-laden conditions in gardens and can be harmful to plants. Sodium chloride (road salt) is the most common de-icer used and is also the most harmful. It’s very effective at melting ice, but it can also cause direct damage to plants. Sodium chloride has the worst reputation and plant safety, while sodium chloride has the best reputation for plant safety. Use it in conjunction with de-icers to decrease the total amount of de-icer needed.

CONSIDER using sand. It is not a de-icer but can add traction and is fairly neutral in the environment. Use it in conjunction with de-icers to decrease the total amount of de-icer needed. DO plant salt tolerant species in areas where you know there will be salt. DO shovel clean snow onto gardens and plants to act as natural insulation. What’s “up”?

Polaris is a diminutive understory shrub that’s native to the coastal plain and is salt tolerant. It has small, oval-shaped green leaves and is covered with white down when young. In autumn, it produces large panicles of small, starry white flowers. It is an excellent choice for coastal locations and can be used in a variety of garden settings, from borders to shade gardens. It is salt tolerant and is a great choice for coastal gardens.

GTG is an evergreen conifer that’s native to the coastal plain and is salt tolerant. It has small, needle-like green leaves that are covered with white down when young. In autumn, it produces small, starry white flowers. It is an excellent choice for coastal locations and can be used in a variety of garden settings, from borders to shade gardens. It is salt tolerant and is a great choice for coastal gardens.

Garlic mustard (Alliaria petiolata) is a space invader that may still be green and growing this time of year, so keep an eye out if you’re out in your garden. Garlic mustard is one of the few plants to have green basal rosettes in winter. Their bright green leaves create a stunning contrast with the snow and can be a beautiful focal point in the garden. Garlic mustard is easy to identify and remove, but it can be hard to get an edge on this invader. If you are identifying garlic mustard early and before it goes to seed, you can greatly reduce its impact. If you remove a large patch, be sure to replant the area with native plants to prevent garlic mustard from reinvading. You can also use a mix of herbicides and cover crops to control garlic mustard. The biggest cause of de-icer pollution and plant damage is misuse and over use. Watch the weather. If temperatures will be above freezing soon after the application of de-icer, wait until the weather warms up to do a major clean-up. And remember, the colder months can be a good time to research plants, and make a springtime work plan. The colder months can be a good time to get deals on gardening tools and supplies.

Here’s to another year of watering, weeding, and enjoying your gardens. And please enjoy this issue of Perennial Pages as we take a closer look at the effect of these critical gardening practices on the environment. What’s “up”?

Watch the weather. If temperatures will be above freezing soon after the application of de-icer, wait until the weather warms up to do a major clean-up. And remember, the colder months can be a good time to research plants, and make a springtime work plan. The colder months can be a good time to get deals on gardening tools and supplies. What’s “up”?

Perennial Pages is 1 Year Old! Hardiness hibiscus, (Hibiscus hybrid, 'Fantasia'). Photo: Sarah Bouboulis

Copyright © 2019 Partnership for the Delaware Estuary. All rights reserved. Become a supporter of the Delaware Estuary Program, leads science-based and conservation efforts to protect Delaware’s rivers, bays, and estuaries. Become a supporter of the Delaware Estuary Program, leads science-based and conservation efforts to protect Delaware’s rivers, bays, and estuaries.