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Winter Tips

It will be mid-winter by the time you read this. Your plants will have been resting for a month or so, and probably a bit longer if you live inland. Many of your trees will have lost their leaves. This is a good time to style one? s trees. One can clearly see the branch structure, and decisions about what to cut and what not, can be more easily made. You may find that the leaves of some deciduous trees dry up but don? t actually drop off. You should remove them yourself at this point, they will just drain the tree of nutrients if left on, and they serve no real purpose at this stage.

Incidentally, they will do a similar thing towards late summer. The leaves can be completely removed then as well. This will cause a new crop of shoots to emerge. Defoliating a tree in summer will cause it to experience a ? false winter? , essentially you are compressing 2 years into 1, making the tree appear twice as old as it actually is.

WARNING! Do not completely defoliate junipers or pines. Ever!! They rely entirely on their leaves for sustenance, and if you remove all their leaves they will die.

Although there is less going on in the garden in winter, it is not necessarily a time for the gardener to rest.

Preparations for the onset of spring should occupy a fair bit of one? s time. I have been washing river sand like crazy. I am mixing up a large batch of repotting soil because I have a ton of little trees and cuttings to repot. The correct time for repotting is just as the weather begins to warm up. I will leave my acacias (thorn trees) till a little closer to spring, when their nodes begin to swell with new shoots. If I lived in an area that gets very cold in winter I would wait till I was sure that most of the cold winter spells had passed.

Recipe for potting soil

- 1 part river sand (coarse and well cleaned) or granite chips
- 1 part good quality potting soil (any brand is OK but it must also be quite coarse)
- Half a handful of slow release plant food granules
- Handful of bone meal
- Technique ? Mix thoroughly.

The above recipe is vague by intention. The most important point is that the soil must drain well. Few plants grow well in a swamp and soil that retains water will cause your tree to rot. The river sand or granite is a neutral medium and must be thoroughly cleaned before mixing.

After repotting, put your plants in shade for 2 weeks. Some experts actually place their trees in complete darkness for this time but I don? t really think this is necessary. The shade conditions will reduce the stress on the newly repotted tree and cause it to send out new shoots to look for light. You can also place them in a warm but not direct sun and cause it to send out new shoots to look for light. Lastly, it is important that you do not water baobabs (and most succulents) during winter. They will rot. Bring them inside out of the rain and dew. You can even remove them entirely from their pots or bags if you wish. Just repot them at the beginning of spring and they will be fine.