

High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

Bringing nature indoors: seedlings, plants, and soil

By Janet Sellers

February indoor gardening

Our coldest month is typically February here, but we still can start up some of our gardening and nature plans now. It is a perfect time to plan the spring garden. Planning is key to success. With a plan at hand, taking action is simple and offers an organized method to work from, even if we change our plans.

It is deceptively simple. Starting with soil and seeds, a quick and simple indoor starter plan can include a daily calendar for soil checks and watering reminders. Making a mini-greenhouse from a plastic salad greens container or milk jugs is as easy as container washing, rinsing, filling with soil and seeds, and covering. The key seems to be a bit of air flow and even moisture. This year I am going to try the layers of pinecones, soil, seed, and water sprinkling.

My mini-greens salad containers with indirect light will stand in for a real greenhouse. I have a lot of saved seeds, so I'll choose veggie or flower seeds. Deer- and pest-resistant plants that protect the garden include marigolds, mint, and "stinky" plants like lavender, iris, purple sage and salvias. Alas, the iris, lilies, daffodils, and most bulb flowering plants are toxic to pets and I avoid them. My garden is full of purple sage, asters, and wildflowers.

Potted indoor plants

I love to have pet-safe flowering indoor no-soil plants like cymbidium orchids around the house. Indoor plants with soil can be tricky with root issues and can get root rot or mold quickly. That's likely a drainage problem, overwatering, or mold. It's best to make oxygen available by aerating the soil and finger-checking the soil top and mid-section often. The cure is in the soil and

microbe health, not fertilizer or adding water. Moisture balance is key for microbial health.

Indoor potted plant health

Smell the soil—it should smell pleasant. Any unpleasant smell indicates bad soil and that means soil replacement: Remove the plant with soil from the pot; check soil. If the soil smells bad or the root is balled up in the pot, shake off the soil onto paper (and toss in the garden), rinse the roots, and repot with new potting soil. I put pinecones at the bottom of the pot, add soil part way, place the plant, then fill up with moist potting soil and water immediately, letting it all drain well.

Janet Sellers is an avid lazy gardener, letting Mother Nature lead the way for indoor and outdoor gardening and landscaping. We'd love to know your spring garden tips, sent them to JanetSellers@ocn.me.

On the Trail (in memory of Tim Watkins)

Trail etiquette

By Steve Pate

Last spring, the Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC) assembled equestrians and others to get input on how to share trails with hikers, trail runners, and mountain bikers. Here are the resulting recommendations to a Colorado Springs Parks and Recreation committee which led to signs in some open space areas. These signs suggest to trail users who encounter equestrians:

- Slow down. Horses are "prey" animals, always on the lookout for predators. Hikers and bikers should slow down and move to the side of the trail.
- Say "Hello." Talking calms the horse and reassures the rider.
- Share the trail. Horses always have the right-of-way.

OCN previously shared Friends of Monument Preserve (FOMP) guidelines for mountain bikers, hikers, and equestrians sharing trails. FOMP's guidelines reiterated those guidelines set forth by TOSC.

Here are guidelines for cyclists and hikers:

Cyclists

- Ride with a bell. Announce your presence in a friendly way. Try not to startle other users.
- When passing hikers, cyclists must yield. Cyclists are responsible for avoiding crashing into someone (or entering their safe space). Ride in control at all times. Be able to slow down and stop if necessary to negotiate a safe pass. Often, it's easier for a hiker to move to the side of the trail to let you pass, and most hikers will do this if there is a safe place and you communicate with them. Thank them and continue on your way.
- If you are riding downhill and encounter someone riding uphill, you must yield to them. Usually, this means slowing and getting to the side or stopping. Get as far off the trail as possible and allow the uphill rider to ride past.
- If you encounter an equestrian, slow down, stop if necessary and engage in a conversation about the best way to pass.
- If there are others in your group, let the person you are passing know how many are behind you.
- If you stop for any reason, move off to the side—don't block the trail.

Hikers/trail runners

- Maintain situational awareness. Watch for other trail users.
- Cyclists are required to yield to hikers and equestrians, but it is much easier for hikers to step off a narrow trail than it is for cyclists

to do so.

- Avoid standing along the outside edge of a switchback/climbing turn. Most cyclists prefer to use the outside of the turn—it's safer and easier to get through the turn.
- If hiking in groups, spread out so that other users can pass safely.
- If you stop along the way, move to the side—don't block the trail.
- Please keep all pets under control, especial-

ly excitable, unruly, or aggressive ones, so they don't negatively impact or injure other users.

Equestrians

As stated above, equestrians have the right of way. When you see someone approaching on horseback, please step aside, say "hello," and control your dog if you have one with you.

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Please stay on designated trails and do not cut across. Above: Monument Preserve, Jan. 14. Below: Santa Fe Open Space, Jan. 17. Photos by Steve Pate.

