

I submit my column a week ahead so it's always a guess about what the weather will be doing while you're reading. I do think this winter might be a bit nippy. We've had a diligent Flicker trying to chip his way into our attic for the winter. When you read this he will be cozily sheltered in his new Flicker birdhouse mounted up under the eaves. If you'd like the plans for a Flicker birdhouse, send me a self-addressed-stamped-envelope with the word "Flicker" on it. I'll also send along a sheet giving dimensions for other birdhouses to build to shelter our Northwest birds.

The story of our Flicker is a continuing saga. If you live in North Kitsap perhaps you remember the amorous Flickers from a previous "Kids Gardening" column. Our Flicker likes the side of our house and our downspouts. One year Mr. Flicker made a home in our attic by drilling his way in through one of the eave vents. My husband and I refer to him as "The Scratcher." In the spring when he's trying to attract a mate, we call her "The Squawker." He makes a great racket by drilling away on our downspout to attract his beloved at the unlovely hour of 3:30 a.m. She sits prettily on the chimney of our neighbor and answers back with her squawking that only another Flicker could love.

I checked with Fay Linger, president of Kitsap Audubon, about the life span of Flickers. They live for about eight years. We've been observing our pair of Flickers for about three years. Every winter the male tries to inhabit our attic so we've researched the birdhouses and decided to give our birds a more permanent home.

In the wild, Flickers nest in hollowed out burrows in trees. We think our house must look like the biggest tree our Flicker has ever seen. We're attaching the birdhouse about 18 feet high on the side of our house up under the eaves where he's been chipping away. We've added a cushion of wood shavings on the floor of the birdhouse for insulation. Additionally that side of the house has a row of sheltering trees that act as a windbreak. I'll let you know how our Flickers are doing in future columns. Hopefully Mr. Flicker and his mate will fill their house with a baby or two in the spring.

While we're on the subject of birds, the National Wildlife Federation recently faxed me a reminder about winterizing our backyards for wildlife habitat. The information reminded us to leave seed heads on flowers rather than deadheading them. The seeds provide food for foraging birds, chipmunks, squirrels and other mammals. The Wildlife Federation recommends black-oil sunflower seeds in birdfeeders. The seeds provide high-calorie food for birds to give them energy to survive cold winter nights. Additionally sunflower seeds aren't quite as messy as some of the other birdseeds and sproutings are easier to control. Don't forget to include suet feeders too. Birds also need water in birdbaths or shallow containers.

You can learn more about backyard habitats or find out how to get your yard certified as an official Backyard Wildlife Habitat by visiting the National Wildlife Federation's website at <http://www.nwf.org> or by calling 800-822-1919.

Closer to home you can join our local Kitsap County Chapter of Audubon by mailing a check for \$20 payable to Kitsap Audubon Society, P.O. Box 961, Poulsbo, WA 98370. Include your name, address and phone number. Memberships make ideal Holiday presents. By mailing the fee before December 30, directly to the Kitsap Chapter, the full amount of the dues plus an additional bonus amount from National Audubon stays here in the local treasury. Each year members receive eight Kitsap Chapter newsletters plus six issues of "National Audubon Magazine." The Kitsap Chapter meets the second Thursday during the months of September through May at 7:00 p.m. at Liberty Bay Presbyterian Church in Poulsbo.

I'll end today's column where I began – with the weather. Don't panic when your plant's leaves curl up. It's the plant's way to protect itself from cold. If some of your plants do suffer die back and frost burn be sure to wait until new growth occurs in the spring before cutting them back or digging them up. Remember to continue watering all your outdoor potted plants and those under the overhangs of your homes. These plants need water and usually don't get enough from rainfall. More on these subjects later.

May this holiday season find you surrounded by friends, family and happy memories.

You can email comments to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.