



Children's Garden Club  
Volume 7, Sheet #12  
December 2, 2006  
Christmas Greens & Holiday Plants  
Sherwood's Forest Nursery & Garden Center

## Welcome to the December Meeting

David and I want to wish you a Happy Holidays and welcome to the December 2006 meeting. I would like to thank David for hosting this month's meeting and all of them through out the year,- years. I know David and I are pleased at how well received the Children's Garden Club has grown. We also wish to thank all the ladies from the Federated Garden Clubs of Missouri, ECD. We all wish you all the very best for the Holiday Season and A Happy New Year. The 20076 Children's Garden Club Calendar is enclosed.

Can you bring a living Balled and Bur lapped or container grown tree indoors? Yes, the secret is to not allow it to dry out or become too wet. Bring your tree in slowly. Have it in the garage a day before you bring indoors. Select a location that is the coolest spot in the house. A sunroom or porch are great. I feel its best if you only allow the tree to be indoors no longer than 10 days – the less is best. When bringing it out, I recommend two (2) days in the garage if it is really cold in moving outdoors. If location is not ready, place in a protected spot and mulch ball well.

### POTTED OR LIVING CHRISTMAS TREE CARE

When bringing in your live Christmas tree (either cut, fresh bur lapped or container grown), consider the possible temperature outside and inside and relate to temperature change. Try and avoid being close to a fireplace. If possible let the tree set in the room overnight before decorating. I would suggest a wash tub for the base container, with a rug and plywood beneath to catch evaporation. Position it away from any heat sources and try to keep Christmas lights from touching the buds and breaking their dormancy and drying out. If possible, use the small min-twinkle lights;

the C-7 light bulbs produce more heat. Never spray a live tree with flocking or fireproofing material. A living/growing tree is not recommended to keep indoors longer than two weeks. I feel a secret of watering to prevent from being soggy is to water with ice cubes. Always keep moist but never wet.

Due to our weather range and quick change, I would recommend heavily mulching the area where you will be digging the hole to keep soil warm and easy to plant. Once planted, be sure to mulch the tree. I have had great success with green Spruce, Douglas Fir and the White Pines.

In many parts of the Country, people celebrate Christmas with a living tree. The roots are kept in a “ball” of earth. The ball can be wrapped in burlap or set into a biodegradable container or pot. The tree may be added to the landscape after the holidays. To use a living Christmas tree successfully, please observe the following points.

1. The adaptability of the species should be considered. Many species are shipped outside of their natural area and may not be adaptable to other areas. Check with a reliable nursery or extension forester.
2. The tree should be stored in an unheated, sheltered area such as a garage or porch, out of the wind and sun. Do not expose the tree to freezing temperatures at any time.
3. The tree will need adequate water. The root ball or soil should be kept slightly damp but not flooded. Wrap the root ball of a balled tree in plastic or place in a tub while it is in the house.
4. Live trees may be decorated, but with care. If lights are used, they must not give off any heat.
5. Do not remove the tree directly from a warm house out into freezing temperatures. Instead, move to a sheltered area first for several days.
6. If the ground is unfrozen, the tree may be replanted. The spot to be dug may be mulched to prevent freezing. Plant as soon as possible.
7. Do not remove the burlap and strapping (unless it is plastic). This keeps the root ball solid and secure. In the instance of a plastic cover, cut the cord and roll down the plastic at least half way prior to planting. Tap the tree container of a potted tree and remove prior to planting. Do not attempt to remove soil from the root system. Earth removed from the original hole should be backfilled around the root ball. Mulch heavily over the top of the planted root ball to prevent it from freezing. Water only as needed; a flooded tree may not survive.
8. Stake the trees to prevent wind tipping or damage during the first growing season.
9. Enjoy

We all decorate using greens, plants, herbs, and fresh or dried, blending their colors and textures. You need to remember texture, contrast, compliments, tones, fragrance, and Christmas colors or combining the colors of your room with the season greens – traditional holly with red berries or variegated holly, balsam fir, noble fir, Douglas fir, silver fir, Fraser firs – all have their own color of green or blue-green or silver-green or the white pine for its long needle airy feel. Incense cedar, or regional juniper with berries, hemlock and boxwood. Also to be considered is the magnolia and eucalyptus, red berry hawthorn, with twig for the natural look. There are so many extras to work with such as a wide range of cones, hemlock, red spruce, white spruce, sugar cone, lodge pole cones, white pine, Norway spruce, Jeffrey, Ponderosa.

The use of herbs are a natural grown outdoors mixed with the Eucalyptus for example the Artemisia “Silver King” grown by many St. Louis gardeners mix with some holly, boxwood, apples, orange and of course the pineapple (the symbol of welcome), can enhance any entry or porch gable. For added touch buy some pomegranates keep some natural, and/or spray the others gold.

Other herbs that add to a wreath or swag are sage, lavender, thyme, lamb’s ears.

For a rustic or country effect, combine a sunflower, ears of corn, wheat, holly, white pine or cedar, barley, millet, some white birch branches and a bow makes a great lamp or back yard swag or wreath for holiday cheer and feeding the birds at the same time. Any and all acorns, nuts, berries, unique twigs can be incorporated into your interior or exterior magic holiday spirit of your own.

Many natural traditions are recycling – a Scandinavian tradition of hanging a “Jule -Neg” bundles for the birds. In Norway at harvest time several of the best bundles of grain were stored in a special place until Christmas Eve. When the long-anticipated time for us/children/and birds/wildlife were also given a gold sheaf of grain securely attached to a pole outdoors and were called “Jule Neg” which means “Christmas bundle”. Now this loving custom has been revived with fall/harvest time and makes a great gift to give or receive or use a gift for your Thanksgiving hostess, and the reason for Thanksgiving and general remembrance of the upcoming holiday season of giving to all including our feathered friends.

### **GUIDE TO HOLIDAY GREENS:**

COOL AND MOIST FOR LONG LIFE - Probably the biggest challenge in working with holiday greens is the prevention of drying out. In order to avoid the frustration of dull, crisp holly and shedding, brown needles, always keep the greens in cool, moist Conditions.

For **TRADITIONAL EVERGREENS**, this means temperatures below 40°F in a location where high humidity can be insured. In cooler climates, outdoor storage is popular and acceptable as long as temperatures stay below 40°F.

The greens **SHOULD NOT** be stored outside directly on pavement or in boxes but ideally on pallets to allow good air circulation. Cover the piles with a tarp at night or when severe weather approaches.

Branches can be stored loose in a cool, sheltered spot protected from drafts and direct sun. Direct sun will dry out and discolor greens, and windy conditions will also dry them out. They can be sprinkled with water every few days if it's not raining or freezing.

Ideally, the best storage situation is to keep the greens boxed in a floral cooler at 34-36°F and 85% humidity. When shipments arrive, open boxes, inspect, loosen or fluff them up, close boxes loosely, and place in the cooler. Inspect and loosen branches every few days.

For **HOLLY** pay extra attention to maintaining proper temperature and humidity requirements. These yuletide greens cannot be exposed to freezing temperatures and must be carefully protected from drying out. For best results, store in moisture-retaining packages in the cooler at 34-36°F and 85% humidity.

**HOLLY AND MISTLETOE** should not be in tight containers or plastic bags. Loosen periodically in boxes and make sure bags are perforated. (A package can still be moisture-retaining while being perforated.)

One lesser-known fact about two common holiday greens - holly and mistletoe - is that they are in the ethylene sensitive category. Exposure to low levels of ethylene can actually cause leaf and berry drop! Precautions must be taken, such as good air circulation and careful packaging.

**FOOD AND WATER** – Don't take greens directly from bags or boxes and put into designs. Do condition them just like cut flowers with floral preservative solution prior to displaying in buckets or designing, with the exception of MISTLETOE. Failure to condition will lead to early drying out and shortened vase life.

To condition, first give stems a fresh cut to remove hardened sap, bacteria and debris that can be clogging the stem ends. Use sharp shear; pounding or shredding is not necessary. Remove lower leaves or needles; then put into warm floral preservative solution. Let stems or branches stand in the solution at least two hours; then put into the cooler until needed. A total conditioning time of at least 24 hours is best, especially if the greens have been stored dry. Re-cut the stems again before using in a vase or arrangement. Use floral preservative solution in all display buckets and designs, and add more solution to foam-based arrangements daily.

**MINIMIZE WATER LOSS AND COLD DAMAGE** - Once the greens are on display in the store or on the way out the door, temperature and moisture requirements must still be kept in mind. The use of anti-transparent sprays (such as

Wilt-Pruf or Crowning Glory) to retard moisture loss is becoming increasingly popular. These materials can be used in combination with the other life-prolonging techniques here. Just remember that spraying with an anti-transparent alone will not provide long life.

Two rules of thumb for spraying with anti-transparence; Make sure there is complete coverage of all surfaces and use a commercial product made for horticulture. Other wax-like products or individual mixtures are often used, but they may be oily, toxic or flammable.

Protect the holiday designs from cold damage too. Make sure to package carefully at the time of sale, especially arrangements containing holly, skimmia and ivy.

One more note on protection. Laws in many states require cut trees and greens displayed in public to be fireproofed. Be sure to check into laws in your state and use commercial products manufactured for that purpose.

### SELECTING YOUR FRESH LIVE CHRISTMAS TREE AND HOW TO KEEP IT SAFE:

1. Freshness is an important key when selecting your tree. The needles should be resilient, and not brittle. Run your finger down a branch - the needles should stay attached. Feel the bottom of the trunk. On fresh trees it will feel sappy moist. In general, the more recently cut the tree - the fresher it will be.
2. Just before putting the tree in its stand, you should cut about an inch or two of the truck off. The resins which have sealed the end of the stump are thus removed and the tree can take up water more readily. A tree which has been allowed to become extremely dry by improper storage will not take up new moisture. Also, remove any old dead needles which have been trapped near the trunk of the tree.
3. Be sure to put the tree in a stand that will hold water. Keep the water level above the base o the tree at all times. Most trees will consume a pint of water or more each day, especially the first few days. Water uptake is still the best single means of keeping your tree safe and fresh.
4. Be sure that the base of the tree is well supported and the tree is placed away from the fireplace, radiators, electric heaters, televisions or any other sources of heat.
5. For safety the tree should not be decorated with cotton, paper, or other materials that burn readily. Wax candles and other types of open flame should be avoided. Lights and wiring should be checked for worn spots and cracks and care should be taken not to overload electric circuits. When you leave your home or retire for the night turn off the tree lights.

6. Trees should be properly disposed of and the needles never burned in a fireplace. A suggestion for after Christmas: Put the tree in the yard and watch it become a haven for birds.
7. Know how to properly use your Christmas tree and have a safe and happy holiday.

## **AS CHRISTMAS TREES THE FIRS WERE FIRST**

No one is really sure what evergreen tree was the first Christmas tree, but some believe that the fir was the most likely candidate. The use of evergreen trees for Christmas evolved in Germany and spread throughout central Europe. Silver fir was a native tree of the area, held its needles well, and would remain attractive after it was cut. Even today in many areas where people are not familiar with types of evergreens, they will call any evergreen tree a “fir”. I noticed a recent ad in which Noble fir trees could be shipped to individuals for holiday use throughout the U.S.

Firs are stately trees belonging to the plant genus *Abies*. For outdoor growth they require cool temperatures and a moist atmosphere. Therefore, most true fir trees are native to the mountain ranges of the world or moist northern climates. Balsam fir was at one time the most popular North American fir for use as a Christmas tree. Its strong fragrance when placed indoors has made it the one often associated with the holiday season, and the fragrance copied for use in early “evergreen” aerosol sprays. The needle retention of firs is good under home conditions.

Since most firs are trees of cool climates, they are not normally used for local holiday tree production or for landscape plantings in our climate. Summers are often too hot and dry which will weaken trees and make them short lived. As holiday trees, Scotch pines have largely replaced firs in modern homes. They are easier to produce in our climate and have excellent needle retention in the home. If you have already purchased a holiday tree but are not sure what kind you have, here are a few tips to identification. If the needles are grouped into bundles which can be pulled from the tree and remain in a bundle, you have a pine. Most often needles will be in bundles of two or five. If the tree has thin flexible needles of five in a bundle, it is most likely a white pine. If there are two needles in a bundle, which are stiff and slightly twisted, it is most likely a Scotch pine. Other pines are sometimes used as Christmas trees, but these two species are the most common.

If the needles on the tree you have purchased are held singly and not in bundles, you may have a spruce or fir. If the needles are stiff, sharp and develop from all sides of the twigs although they may face upward, you may have a spruce. Spruce needles are squares or diamond-shaped. When a needle is broken in half, look at the broken end for an angular shape. If that shape is present it is most likely a spruce. Spruces make attractive, although fairly expensive, holiday trees. Norway spruce or Colorado blue spruce are often available as balled-and-bur lapped trees for use indoors during the holidays and then should be planted promptly into the landscape.

If the needles are flattened rather than angular in cross section, the tree may well be a true fir or possibly a Douglas fir or hemlock. If the needles are fairly small, lie in a flat plane on thin twigs with obvious whitish lines beneath them, the tree is most likely a hemlock. Hemlocks are less common as holiday trees. If the needles are flat, waxy, but with white lines beneath, it could be a balsam or other true fir. If there are no lines beneath the needles, it might be a Douglas fir.

Whatever holiday tree is used, it will be safer and last longer if the base is cut off at least one-half inch before it is placed in water. Use a stand that holds ample water and keep it filled. A tree will rapidly absorb water during the first days indoors, possibly a gallon in 24 hours and a quart a day for the first few days, so it is particularly important to watch the stand and make sure the base of the trunk is always in water. Some tests have indicated that an interruption in water flow can lead to as much needle drop as not putting the tree in water at all. In the usually drier indoor atmosphere, water is lost rapidly from the needles. A 6-foot tree can absorb about a quart of water daily. Spraying trees with a fire retardant is also beneficial as long as the tree is not allowed to dry out. Remember that this is only a retardant that prevents flash fires. Safety in wiring of lights, locating trees away from heat sources, avoidance of flammable items near a tree, as well as all other safety precautions, are still very important for all evergreen decorations.

The origin of some of the first American Christmas trees I have read about, range from a home-sick German Hessian troop when they had to fight the Revolutionary War. Another being set up by Charles Follen, a German professor at Harvard, in 1832. Another is credited to August Imbred of Wooster, Ohio, who decorated a tree for his nephew and niece in 1847.

The Evergreen tree is usually called a fir in the legends because “fir” is a layman’s term for all evergreens and because few of those who translated the legends knew botany. In England, it was symbolic of life enduring. In Germany, it was decorated with flowers and colored eggs. One legend says the “fir” was the original tree of life in Eden and had big leaves and blossoms until Eve ate of its fruit. In punishment, its leaves were shrunken to needles, its fruit to cones. Another legend says it bloomed again the night of the Nativity and thus became the First Christmas Tree.

Cleveland, Ohio, had a tree in 1851, set up by Pastor Henry Schwan from his congregation. President Franklin Pierce, our 14th President, did much to spread the customs by having a Christmas tree in the White House when the Sunday School of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church was entertained there.

In 1923 President Calvin Coolidge started the national Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, now held every year on the White House lawn.

It was another American President, however, who almost stopped the custom. President Theodore Roosevelt noted for his efforts in conservation of our natural

resources, banned the Christmas tree tradition at the White House. His sons, however, smuggled a tree in and when confronted with their crime, were defended by America's first forester Gifford Pinchot. He convinced the president that the cutting of young Evergreens could be helpful in forest conservation and in so doing established a new industry in America which now annually markets over 30 million Christmas trees.

Testing for freshness: A fresh tree has a good fragrance and good color along with ease of bending the needles between your thumb and forefinger. If it is fresh, the needles will bend and snap back with ease. Also reach and touch the center of the tree and grasp a branch. Slide your hand out along the branch. If the tree is fresh, the needles will stay intact and will not fall off. Now if you are untying a new tree, pick up the tree and shake it first, getting off the old needles, then give it the test again.

Just before putting the tree in its stand, just cut about an inch off the trunk. The resins which have sealed the end of the stump are thus removed and the tree can take up water more readily. A tree which has been allowed to become sealed will not take up new moisture.

Be sure you put the tree in a stand that will hold enough water. Keep the water level above the base of the tree at all times. Most trees will consume a quart of water or more each day, especially the first few days. Water uptake is still the best single means of keeping your tree safe and fresh.

Be sure that the base of the tree is well supported and the tree is placed away from the fireplace, radiators, electric heaters, televisions or any other sources of heat.

Being safety minded, a real tree should not be decorated with cotton, paper, or other materials that burn readily. If you have young children this cannot be avoided because they have probably made ornaments at school -- so be sure to keep these away from lights or heat source. Wax candles and other types of open flame should be avoided. Lights and wiring should be checked for worn spots and cracks and care should be taken not to overload electric circuits. When you leave your home or retire for the night, turn off, if possible unplug, the tree lights.

A two-foot high tree takes approximately 100-150 miniature lights, 20 ft. Of garland and 25-30 decorations. A six-footer would take 300-450 mini lights, 75 ft. Of garland, and 100-150 decorations. The decorations/ornaments could range from a theme idea, glass ornaments, handmade items, dolls, or bows.

When decorating a tree, place the lights on the tree first from top to bottom, back and forth, from inside the tree and back out (the in and out give the tree depth and fullness) so that the plugs are always in the center of the tree or at the bottom of the tree. The only exception is if you use a lighted tree topper, I would suggest a designated or separate extension cord or strain of lights.

A tree is usually decorated lights first, ornaments and decorations, and then garland, tinsel, baby's breath, or the special finishing touch.

Trees should be properly disposed of and the needles **never burned in a fireplace**. A suggestion for after Christmas: Put the tree in the yard and watch it become a haven for birds by laying it outside in the yard below a bird feeder for the birds for protection, or take it to a County Park to have shredded and used as mulch.

### CHRISTMAS TREES: THE ENVIRONMENT & POST HOLIDAY USES

Breathe deeply at a Christmas tree farm and you will enjoy not only the fresh pine fragrance, but also fresh, oxygenated air. That's because of photosynthesis: the trees absorb carbon dioxide-laden air and emit oxygen.

This process of removing excessive carbon dioxide and other harmful gases from the atmosphere also delays the earth-warming "greenhouse effect."

Just one acre of Christmas trees produces the daily oxygen requirement for 18 people. Young trees in their rapid growth years have a high rate of photosynthesis and thus produce more oxygen than older trees.

For each Christmas tree cut, 2 to 3 new trees are planted. In the United States, there are approximately one million acres in production for growing Christmas trees. This translates to oxygen for 18 million people per day.

After the holidays, a Christmas tree has many uses:

1. Place the Christmas tree in the garden for use as a winter bird feeder and shelter. Use orange slices and bird food to attract birds.
2. Christmas trees are biodegradable. The branches can be removed and used as mulch in the garden. The trunk can be chopped for mulch.
3. Large quantities of trees make effective sand and soil erosion barriers, especially at beaches.
4. Sunk into fish ponds, trees make excellent refuge and feeding areas.
5. Balled and potted trees can be planted in the yard for added years of enjoyment.

Tree trimming average Guidelines:

Tree Height	# Mini Lights	Garland	Ornaments.
2'	35 – 40	24' x 2"	15
3'	70 – 80	30' x 2"	24
4'	100 – 120	48' x 2"/3"	36
6'	200 – 240	72' x 3"	48

Real Christmas trees are an all-American product, grown in all 50 states, including Alaska & Hawaii. Most artificial trees are manufactured in Korea, Taiwan or Hong Kong.

The Holiday Decorating is endless .....There is a wide assortment of plants that are a part of the Holidays.

**MISTLETOE** - Mistletoe is native to southeast Missouri, but because forests are rapidly disappearing in the Bootheel, it is not very common. It grows as a parasite in the tops of several hardwood trees. The scientific name Phoradendron translates as “tree thief”, emphasizing the parasitic nature of mistletoe. In Missouri, the most common host trees are sycamore, American elm tupelo and river birch. Although mistletoe is parasitic, it does contain chlorophyll and therefore can produce its own food. It usually is found growing in isolated or edge trees where it receives more sunlight. If you decorate with mistletoe for the holidays, you should be aware that the white berries are poisonous.

**POINSETTIA** Also a tradition is the Poinsettia. This usually red flowering plant is the Christmas season as the Mum is to Fall. The Poinsettia Euphoria Pulcherrima is native to South Mexico. The Poinsettia derives its name from Joel R. Poissett, an American Ambassador to Mexico in 1825. He introduced to the United States with its scarlet bracts, contrasted with its yellow flower and it has won a special place in everyone’s home now, nationwide. According to (USDA) United States Department of Agriculture, Poinsettias are the number one potted plant grown in the United States and an estimated 56,300,000 poinsettias are sold annually. The plants are grown/sold from Mickys Mini - a miniature table top 2" pot to 4", 6", 8" stock plants, topiary trees, and hanging baskets. Colors can range from the traditional red to white, shades of pink-marble, Jingle Bells, Monet and Peppermint.

Since 1919 stories unconfirmed circulated about the Poinsettia - according to the tale, a 2 year-old child of an army officer stationed in Hawaii died from eating a Poinsettia bract. There was never any medical documentation to back up this story. After years of testing the Poinsettia was exonerated as a poisonous plant. In December 19, 1975, a commission issued a statement denying (the tale of poisonous plant) the petition to require caution labeling. But, as with many plants may cause varying degrees of discomfort if eaten and of course should be kept/placed out of reach of small children.

### **HOW TO CARE FOR THE POINSETTIA.....TENDERLY**

The life of the poinsettia, if cared for properly during the holidays can be extended throughout the year.

#### **During the Holidays**

- When selecting a poinsettia, choose tightly clustered, small, central flowers with crisp and bright foliage.

- When surface soil is dry to the touch, water thoroughly. Discard excess water in the saucer.
- To prolong color, keep a temperature range of 60 degrees for night and 72 degrees for day. High humidity is preferable.
- Avoid cold drafts and protect from cold winds.

### **To Re-bloom for the Next Season**

- During Winter, continue to follow holiday upkeep tips.
- When bracts fade, cut back to eight inches.
- Lightly fertilize every three to four weeks.
- When temperatures are warm, place plant out-of doors; first in indirect, then direct light. Avoid temperatures below 50 degrees throughout summer.
- Cut back stems and branches twice during the summer. Repot if needed.
- On Labor Day, move plant inside. Provide six or more hours of direct light.
- From October 1 through mid-December, confine plant to darkness for 14 hours, giving it 10 hours of natural light. This will force the green bracts to color.

### **THE LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA.....**

On a Christmas Eve long ago Pepita was sad. This little Mexican girl wanted more than anything to give a fine present to the Christ Child at the church service that evening. But she was very poor and had no gift. As she walked sorrowfully to church with her cousin, Pedro, he tried to console her. "Pepita," he said, "I am certain that even the most humble gift, given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes." So Pepita gathered a bouquet of common weeds from the roadside and entered the church. As she approached the altar, her spirits lifted. She forgot the humbleness of her gift as she placed it tenderly at the feet of the Christ Child....and there was a miracle! Pepita's insignificant weeds burst into brilliant bloom. They were called Flores de Noche Buena - Flowers of the Holy Night. We call them poinsettias.

### **.....AND THE HISTORY**

The Euphorbia pulcherrima, or poinsettia, is native to Mexico. First cultivated by the Aztecs, it was then called Cuetlaxochitl and prized by them as a symbol of purity. The poinsettia also had practical value for the Aztecs. They made a crimson dye from the colorful bracts and a fever medicine from the milky latex that drips from poinsettias when they are cut. Seventeenth century Franciscan priests were the first to include poinsettias in their Christmas celebration. They used them in the nativity procession Fiesta of Santa Pesebre. The man who introduced poinsettias to the United States was

our 1st Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett. He had some sent to his home in Greenville, South Carolina in 1825.....and this lovely Christmas flower has since borne his name.

Poinsettia (Euphorbia Pulcherrima) are green plants with long-lived bracts (vividly colored leaves) and golden-yellow flowers. A bit of tender loving care and the newer varieties will last longer than ever before! Place in a room where there is sufficient natural light to read fine print. Avoid drafts or excess heat from appliances, radiators or ventilating ducts. Place plant high enough to be away from traffic and out of reach of unmonitored children and animals. Put plant in or on a water-proof container to protect your furnishings. Water plant thoroughly when soil surface is dry to touch. Remember to discard excess water. To prolong bright color of bracts, temperatures should not exceed 72 degrees day or 60 degrees night.

Dave has chosen the Norfolk Island Pine as your Holiday Plant this year. Dave has been so generous each December and throughout the year. Thank You, Dave.

### **NORFOLK ISLAND PINE**

Araucaria Excelsa

This tree is one of many plants whose discovery we owe to the Age of Exploration. Norfolk Island was discovered by Captain James Cook in 1774. The Norfolk Island (Australia) is a thirteen square mile speck in the South Pacific between New Zealand and Australia.

Care - The Norfolk Island Pine is fairly tolerant of home conditions. It is strictly a St. Louis indoor plant. The plant does best in humus soil on the acid side, temperature on the cool side. Regular thorough soakings between letting it dry out somewhat. An occasional misting is good. Does best in filtered light but will tolerate low light.

### **AMARYLLIS**

Hippeastrum Leapoldii

Tropical America, Peru

While about 70 species of Amaryllis grow wild in the southern hemisphere, only a few are available for commercial sale. These remarkably beautiful hybrids have impressive large flowers 8 to 9 inches. The colors range from exotic Christmas Red to Salmon, Soft Pink, and Coral to White.

Care - Good light. The better the light the more brilliant the flower color. Soak thoroughly. Let drain, let dry and then water again.

## **AZALEAS**

Rhododendron. Subtropical, China

Member of the heath Family Azaleas are among the most beautiful and widely used shrubs and are forced for indoor bloom. Linnaeus established the genus Azalea in 1735 in addition to the genus Rhododendron in 1753. In 1796, because of technical similarity, the two genera were both combined under Rhododendron having Azalea as a subgroup. The indoor Azalea is highly hybridized for flowering in pots from December until April and hardy deciduous Azaleas to bloom in the gardens in spring.

Care - partial sun, good filtered light. Likes humidity. Never allow to dry thoroughly

## **CYCLAMEN**

Cyclamen Persicum (Indicum) “Alpine Violet”. Greece and Mediterranean Islands.

This is an exquisite autumn and winter flowering plant with large, flat tubers bearing a rosette of succulent heart-shaped bluish leaves beautifully marbled and traced in silver. Red, pink, white elegant long stemmed nodding flowers remind you of shooting stars,. Your Christmas plant may bloom until April if grown in good light, in a cool spot and watered properly.

Care - Keep moist, but always from beneath its crown. Otherwise the crown will rot. Never wet the foliage or let set in unused water.

## **CHRISTMAS ROSE**

Helleborus niger.

Various plants have been called Christmas rose, but perhaps best known is the black hellebore. Botanically no rose at all but kin to the buttercup, it has been used as a medicine and a poison for thousands of years. From Egypt it was taken to early Greece and used as a purgative and to treat epilepsy, gout, and mental disorders. It was strewn about the house to dispel evil spirits. One early legend says a little shepherd girl wept because she had no gift for the Babe on the night of the nativity. An angel took pity on her and, with a lily for a wand, commanded the Helleborus niger, which grew nearby, to blossom. It did, for the first time ever, and the little girl gathered an armful and took them to the stable in Bethlehem. She was exalted when the Babe turned from the gifts of the Magi and reached for the flowers.

## **SAINFOIN**

Onobrychis viciifolia

## **LADY’S BEDSTRAW**

Galium verum

Legends say that much of the hay in the manger at the stable on the night of the Nativity came to bloom in celebration. Among the legendary plants was sainfoin, a European legume related to the vetches, with spikes of pink flowers. It is supposed to have formed a wreath around the head of the Babe. The common name, sainfoin, means wholesome hay, not holy hay as it sometimes said.

Also in the stable's legendary hay was lady's bedstraw, member of a family of weeds common in America and often called cleavers. In Europe it was used to stuff mattresses because it was supposed to repel fleas. The legends say Mary lay on a bed of this bedstraw and that when Jesus was born it burst into yellow bloom. For this it was regarded with golden flowers, though most bedstraws have white flowers.

### **ENGLISH HOLLY**

*Alex aquifolium*

Holly was known and revered by early British Druids and Roman pagans. The Druids thought it was a special favorite of the sun because it was evergreen. The Romans used it as a charm to ward off lightning and evil spells and believed its blossoms could repel poison. They sent sprigs of holly to their friends during Saturnalia. The early Christian Church forbade the use of holly, particularly during the Saturnalia, but the Romans largely ignored the ban. So did the British, among whom arose the custom of hanging sprigs of holly about the house as hiding places for Christmas elves and fairies. In Germany a soberer legend evolved about the holly, which was called Christdorn, or Christ's crown of thorns. The berries were believed to have been white until they were stained by Christ's blood.

### **GLASTONBURN THORN**

*Crataegus monogyna*

Botanically, the Glastonbury thorn is an ordinary English hawthorn, but legend says this particular tree grew from a staff Joseph of Arimathea thrust into the soil when he arrived to Christianize England. It thrived and came to bloom on Christmas, and trees grown from its cuttings were believed to heal any who touched them on Christmas day. In Elizabethan times a Puritan who tried to destroy the parent tree cut one of its twin trunks but was blinded by its thorns as it fell. Glastonbury thorns continued to bloom at Christmas until 1752 when England adopted the Gregorian calendar.

### **IVY *Hedera helix***

The traditions held holly to be a man's plant, ivy a woman's. To the Greeks, Ivy was an emblem of happiness, fertility, and honor. Poets were crowned with it. Bacchus, the god of wine, wore a rather rakish crown of ivy, perhaps because it was supposed to prevent intoxication. Also an emblem of fidelity, it was used in wreaths for the newly married. Its black berries at one time were thought to be a remedy for the plague.

They weren't of course. Ivy was used as decoration for churches and homes at Christmas, but only for outer passages and on doorways, where it was put up on Christmas Eve, taken down on Candlemas Eve. And poles twined with ivy and holly, the woman's plant and the man's were set up for Christmas sports and games.

### **ROSEMARY *Rosmarinus officinalis***

The legends say that on the flight into Egypt, Mary was sheltered by a rosemary bush, and hence it blooms on the day of Christ's passion. So it was long used to decorate homes and churches at Christmas. A symbol of remembrance and hence a funeral herb, carried by mourners and planted near graves, it also was a token of happiness. Carried in a bride's bouquet it was supposed to be insurance of a faithful husband. Anne of Cleves carried rosemary at her wedding to Henry VIII, but apparently the tradition faltered; or perhaps Henry preferred the belief, then current, that a sprig of rosemary, particularly in the bath, made one "lusty, lovely, joyful and youngly." Over the centuries, it has been a kind of all-purpose herb, elixir, cure-all, purifier of dreams, and even incense in humble country churches.

### **LAUREL *Laurus nobilis***

The laurel of the legends is the European species, not America's laurel-magnolia, also called sweet bay, or our flowering mountain laurel. The European laurel was chewed by the priestesses at Delphi to inspire visions and prophecies and its leaves were burned for incense. Poets and heroes were crowned with laurel leaves – we still speak of "winning the laurels"; and young doctors when they finished their studies were crowned with laurel at the berry stage. From this, *bacca plus laureus*, came "baccalaureate" and "bachelor." In later times, after the advent of Christianity, laurel was used to decorate churches and houses at Christmas and in some places in Greece is still spread on church floors on Holy Saturday. It is also used as a charm to ward off thunderstorms, witches, and devils. We use the leaves, bay leaves, in cooking.

### **PAPERWHITE NARCISSUS**

Atazelta Narcissus

Paperwhite Narcissus (*Atazelta Narcissus*) comes from the Mediterranean region - a bulb that has given endless winter pleasure to plant lovers. The Paperwhite remains one of the easiest and most popular bulbs for indoor forcing - to bloom indoors during the winter.

The Paperwhite is not hardy in northern latitudes. Commercially, these bulbs are produced in moderate climates in countries such as Italy, France and Israel. In the U.S. they are produced in Oregon. Paperwhite can be grown only in zones 9 and 10 outdoors. Missouri is in zone 4/5, so they are not hardy here.

The clusters of star-shaped flowers and delicate fragrance are pleasant during the

bleak days of December and January. As a child's project, or for anyone who loves flowers in winter, growing these bulbs can be very rewarding.

Paperwhite narcissus bulbs are normally available from nurseries and garden centers at the same time as daffodils, which is also of the narcissus species. Bulbs will normally take 4 to 6 weeks to come into flower after planting. A few plantings at about 2 week intervals can give you fragrant flowers through February.

Although most people prefer the white varieties, there is also a yellow form sometimes of paperwhite narcissus. This yellow type may be found under several variety names, including Soleil d'or, Grand Soleil d'or or Rising Sun narcissus. The deep yellow color of the flowers adds brightness to the winter even though the flower clusters tend to be smaller than those of the white varieties.

Keep bulbs that are not planted immediately after purchase cool. Bulbs stored at warm temperatures will be poorer in quality and may fail to flower when planted later in the fall. These are not hardy narcissus, and should not be planted outdoors in our climate.

Bulbs may be planted either in soil or in bowls containing pebbles or gravel. Bulbs planted in pots of soil or other potting material tend to be easier to care for, and have less tendency to fall over than those grown in gravel and water. Since these bulbs will not be useful for another forcing, any light, porous soil or soil mix may be used.

To grow bulbs in gravel and water use a shallow bowl large enough in diameter to hold 4 to 6 bulbs. Space bulbs uniformly in the bowl and plant them deep enough so bulbs are almost covered with gravel. If you plant them too shallow, the developing roots may push the bulb out of the bowl. Check them occasionally and push the bulbs back into the gravel when necessary. Keep the water level to the base of the bulb, but do not cover the entire bulb with water. As roots develop, you can allow the water level to drop since the roots will be able to pick it up. There will also be less danger of rot invading the bulb.

To keep the foliage and flower stems from becoming too leggy, keep bulbs cool after planting. Temperatures close to 45 degrees are excellent for the early stages. Darkness is not necessary, but light is not needed until top growth begins. Wait until growth is 2' or 4" tall. Keep temperature about 45 to 55 degrees or as cool as possible.

As leaves begin to develop move the pot or bowl to a bright window in a cool room. Move to a cooler location after leaves are developed enough so that you see flower buds of the leaf cluster. Temperatures in the 50's, particularly at night, allow good development without excessive legginess. You can accelerate growth in a warmer location, but plants will become taller.

Discard bulbs after they have finished flowering. They do not have enough stored food for a second forcing, and they cannot normally survive our winter when planted outdoors.

The love and enjoyment of gardening or horticulture is an all-year hobby. You are invited to join us in January 7, 2007, as we start a new year with an exciting year ahead. We will start with a visit to Baisch & Skinner, one of the largest wholesale florist distributors in the Midwest located at 2721 LaSalle Street (664-1212 in direction or needed)

We will learn another way of flower arranging, different from last year, which will head us into the garden Flower Show at the Builders Home & Garden Show March 16th to 19th. This year's theme is Life Styles.

Wishing you all a Happy Holiday and Happy New Year.

## 2007 Calendar Children's Garden Club

All meetings are at 9:00 a.m. – on the first Saturday of each month (except July and September) at different locations throughout St. Louis County and City. All are Free. No RSVP's are required, everyone welcome. The Children's Garden Club is designed. To educate, as well as bring delight in gardening and horticulture with projects they start. Themselves and take home to continue to grow and enjoy.

- January 7, 2007 Flower Arranging Baisch & Skinner, Inc., 2721 LaSalle
- February 3, 2007 Birding, Sappington Garden Center, 11530 Gravois
- February 22-25 Home & Garden Show - Booth 1535 America's Center
- March 3, 2007 "My Garden by my bedside" Sherwood's Forest Nursery & Garden Center 2651 Barrett Station Road
- April 7, 2007 Celebrate Arbor Day For the Garden at Haefner's 6703 Telegraph Road
- May 5, 2007 Vegetables – "Plant a Row for the Hungry" Missouri Botanical Garden
- June 2, 2007 Gourds, Sherwood's Forest Nursery & Garden Center 2651 Barrett Station Road
- July 14, 2007 Flowers for Kids & visit from Buzz the Bee Location not set
- August 4, 2007 Open as of November 27, 2006
- September 8, 2007 Horticulture Craft – Gourd Bird House
- October 6, 2007 Title not decided For the Garden at Haefners, 6703 Telegraph Rd.
- November 3, 2007 Putting the Garden to Bed, Sherwood's Forest & Garden Center 2651 Barrett Station Rd.
- December 1, 2007 Holiday Deco from the Garden, Sherwood's Forest And Garden Center, 2651 Barrett Station Road

## HOLIDAY TRIVIA TIME

Check your Christmas IQ – and have fun – at the same time.

1. On December 15, what must you kiss to make all your Christmas wishes come true?
  - a. Pomegranate
  - b. Christmas ornament
  - c. Donkey
2. If you smell a yellow rose the morning of Dec. 17, what Christmas gift will you receive?
  - a. Crystal vase
  - b. Diamonds
  - c. Texas A&M football
3. Finding an orange in the toe of your Christmas stocking means you will receive which of the following?
  - a. Profitable Valentine's Day
  - b. Great gourmet basket sales
  - c. A rotten Halloween
4. Drop three cranberries on the floor. Follow the farthest one out to find what?
  - a. Profitable Thanksgiving season
  - b. The love of your life
  - c. A stain on your carpet.
5. Who is credited with introducing the Christmas tree to England?
  - a. Charles Dickens
  - b. Prince Albert
  - c. Scrooge
6. What year is the earliest historical reference to a decorated evergreen in a home?
  - a. 1605
  - b. 1253
  - c. 12 B.C.
7. Some of the earliest Christmas tree ornaments were made of what substance?
  - a. Wood
  - b. Wax
  - c. Paper ribbon
8. Luminaries are made of candles, sand and what wrapping material?
  - a. Gift wrap from the shop
  - b. Paper bags
  - c. Wall Street Journals
9. What is the best holiday greeting?

- a. Merry Christmas
  - b. Happy Holidays
  - c. Bah humbug
10. The Sears Roebuck catalog is called what?
- a. The Wish Book
  - b. The Gift Book
  - c. The Credit Card Enhancer
11. The British noisemakers known around the world are called what?
- a. Poppers
  - b. Crackers
  - c. Punk rockers
12. Cardboard champagne bottles were popular American tree ornaments in what decade?
- a. Roaring '20s
  - b. 1890s
  - c. 20<sup>th</sup> century
13. What company produces most of the glass ornaments made in America?
- a. Fostoria
  - b. Corning
  - c. U.S. Steel
14. Blowing handcrafted glass ornaments is what?
- a. Hot work
  - b. Easy
  - c. Great for your lungs
15. Candles were lighted on Christmas Eve in European churches and homes for what purpose?
- a. To welcome the Christ Child
  - b. To light Christmas services
  - c. To provide Rudolph with an additional beacon
16. What member of the family traditionally lit the candles on the tree?
- a. Mother
  - b. Father
  - c. Youngest child with the longest hair. (Remember, we said this was in jest.)

Answers:

- |      |      |       |       |
|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. a | 5. b | 9. b  | 13. b |
| 2. b | 6. a | 10. a | 14. a |
| 3. a | 7. b | 11. b | 15. a |
| 4. b | 8. b | 12. b | 16. b |

Saint Nicholas Day – December 6<sup>th</sup>.

Saint Nicholas

Early in the Advent season celebrate a feast that has been popular for centuries in Christian countries, especially in Northern Europe. In our over-commercialized society, this holiday gives us a good “teaching moment” to remind children that Jolly Santa Claus, is, in fact, Saint Nicholas, a fourth century bishop of the city of Myra in what is now Turkey.

Saint Nicholas was renowned for his great kindness and his generous aid to those in distress. Among the kind and miraculous acts attributed to him are saving three young girls from prostitution by secretly providing them with dowries, raising three murdered boys from the dead, and saving sailors caught in stormy seas. For these reasons, he is considered the patron saint of children, unmarried girls, and sailors, among others.

Traditional celebrations of Saint Nicholas Day in Northern Europe included gifts left in children’s shoes (the original of our American Christmas stockings). Good children receive treats – candies, cookies, apples and nuts, while naughty children receive switches or lumps of coal. Sometimes coins were left in the shoes, reminiscent of the life-saving dowries the saint provided. Today – especially in families of German extraction – children still put a shoe outside their bedroom doors on the eve of Saint Nicholas Day, and expect to find candy and coins or small gifts in their shoe on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

In some households the father of the family may dress up as Saint Nicholas on the eve of his feast. He comes in, sometimes with his sidekick, Krampus or Black Peter, and helps each child examine his conscience. He admonishes the bad and rewards the good. If your family enjoys theatrics, this is a wonderful opportunity early in Advent to inspire children to amend their ways in preparation for the coming King. (Your family might get together with other families with young children and celebrate together.)

The following recipe, for “speculaas” (speculations) ginger cookies are served especially on Saint Nicholas Day. The recipe is from *A Continual Feast*, by Evelyn Birge Vitz (Ignatius Press), and is traditional in the Low Countries. (In America these cookies are called “windmills”, usually embellished with almonds, and can be brought at the grocery store.)

This cookies dough may be cut into the shape of Saint Nicholas, following our pattern here, which can also be used for coloring. When cool, the cookies can be decorated with icing “paint” – thinned icing colored with food coloring – and applied with brushes.

This delicious ginger cookies might also be cut into other shapes, recalling other aspects of the kindly bishop’s legendary life and work: such as the three young girls to whom he threw the three bags of gold for their doweries, or the three little boys whom he brought back to life or the sailors whom he saved from the storm.

Family Activities  
Saint Nicholas Day Baking Project

### Speculaas Cookies

1 cup (2 sticks) sweet butter, at room temperature  
2 cups dark brown sugar  
2 eggs  
Grated rind of 1 lemon  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg or mace  
½ teaspoon ground cloves  
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger  
1/8 teaspoon cardamom  
1/8 teaspoon salt  
4 cups flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder

Optional: Powdered sugar for decorative icing.

In a large bowl, cream the butter with the sugar until fluffy. Stir in the eggs one at a time, blending thoroughly after each addition. Stir in the lemon rind.

Sift the spices and salt with the flour and baking powder, and stir gradually into the butter mixture. Wrap in waxed paper or plastic wrap and chill for several hours or overnight. (If you are in a hurry, start the chilling process in the freezer; Leave the dough in the freezer for about 20 minutes.)

On a floured surface, roll out the dough to about 1/8 inch, or for larger figures to about ¼ inch. Cut out with cookie cutters, or trace around a heavy paper pattern with a sharp knife. This dough can also be used with a cookie mold, or can be molded by hand.

Bake at 350 degrees until lightly browned. If you like your cookies soft, remove them from the oven when they are just set – the longer the baking time, the crisper the cookie.

Optional: Paint when cool. These cookies especially when baked in the form of Saint Nicholas are fun to paint with colored icing.

#### Icing “Paint”

In little pots or plastic containers, mix powdered sugar with a little bit of water (or lightly beaten egg white, or lemon juice) and a few drops of food coloring, to produce the desired shades and the desired consistency for painting. Apply with small paint brushes.

Yield: Approximately 3 dozen cookies or fewer large figures.

## Saint Nicholas Day

In Belgium:

Saint Nicholas was born in Turkey. He was very rich. At midnight he would come out and put clothes on poor people's doorstep.

How you celebrate it:

People get presents. On this day little children get bags filled with sweets, oranges, and peppernuts.

A lot of people sing songs about Saint Nicholas. This is a song I like:

O kom er enns kijken, wat ik in mijn schoentje vind:  
Alles gekregen van die geode Sint.  
Een pop meet vlechten in neet haar.  
Een snoezig jurkje kant en klaar.  
Drie kaatseballen in een net,  
Een letter van bankeet.  
Een drijftol met en sweep erbij,  
Een doos met blokken ook voor mij.  
En Jongens fijn. Een autopet,  
Een letter van banket.

In English:

Oh come and look at what I found in my shoe:  
I got everything from the good saint.  
A doll with braids in her hair  
And a really cute dress.  
Three balls in a net,  
A letter made out of chocolate.  
A top with a stick,  
A box of blocks all for me.  
A boy's fun. A scooter,  
And a letter made out of chocolate.

Ans P., Age 11, Bernadorte School, Copenhagen, Denmark

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In Poland:

The 6<sup>th</sup> of December St. Nicholas comes and gives us sweets and special cookies. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of December we wait for the first star in the sky to eat our dinner then we walk around our Christmas Tree.

Weronik, Age 9, Bernadote School, Copenhagen, Denmark.

In the U.S.A.:

We celebrate Saind Nicholas Day in our home.

Saint Nicholas Day is to remind us to be good, tell the truth, be kind to each other, respect people and always try to be the best we can be.

On Saint Nicholas Day, we place a towel on our beds and go to school. If we were good for most of the year, Saint Nicholas will leave us some fruit, nuts, and sweets. If we were bad, he will leave us either an onion, a rotten potato, or a piece of coal. One of our brothers got an onion one year. He was getting bad grades in school and had been caught lying.

Saint Nicholas Day also reminds us that Christmas Day is soon.

We celebrate Christmas by buying a Christmas tree, always a pine tree. We set the tree in a stand and sometime during the night, after we have gone to bed, Santa's elves come to our home and decorate the tree.

Santa Claus comes to our home during the night of Christmas Eve and leaves presents for us.

On Christmas Eve, we go to church, we are Roman Catholic. On Christmas Day, we usually go to our grand-mothers home for a big dinner. Most of our relatives are there, there is usually about forty people there. It is a lot of fun and we usually eat too much

Christine C., age 12, and Cindy C., age 9, Dublin, California, U.S.A.

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Enrichment:

Look for authentic icons of Nicholas the Bishop. Compare these with old and new drawings of Sants.

Kindness begets kindness....Greek Proverb.

St. Nicholas Trivia:

1. The slurred pronunciation of the name Christkindl may have given rise to another of Santa's pseudonyms, Kriss Kringle.
2. Our Santa traces his costume and history to St. Nicholas.
3. Remember the 3 purses of gold St. Nichols threw in the window for the poor girls? We recognize them today in the 3 gold balls over a pawnbroker's shop.
4. In their excitement, many English-speaking children uttered Sinterklaas' name so quickly that it sounded like "Sainty Claus." After years of mispronunciation, the name evolved into Santa Claus.
5. St. Nicholas Day continued to be observed in the U.S. and many communities throughout the world.

# Holiday - Greens & Plants

S X Y O H W E N T N O M P W T  
O I O O A L O R U H E L A R L  
K Y L N Z Z V I Y B U B P U N  
B L W L P Y A F T M I M E I K  
Y C C D Y O O L I H Y Q R N B  
U S X U O R I N E P F U W E H  
P O M E G R A N Q A T E H M O  
V E E R T R Q M T Q S Y I A L  
C K O G I L Y J A S R U T L I  
E O T E L T S I M A E F E C D  
Q Q S H A Y Y Y M P E T X Y A  
H O B L Y B K E Z Q D N T C Y  
D M T H D H S C F B W L I I C  
S F X Q Q O N A T U R A L P A  
U A X I R T M P C F Z P U A D

AMARYLLIS  
FIR  
LUMINARIES  
PAPERWHITE  
POMEGRANQATE

AZALEAS  
HOLIDAY  
MISTLETOE  
PINE  
ROSEMARY

CYCLAMEN  
HOLLY  
NATURAL  
POINTSETTIA  
TREE

15 of 15 words were placed into the puzzle.

Solution