



“What’s Growing On...”

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RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION ON THE RADIO

For agriculture news and horticultural tips, listen to me, Pam Burton, on the RCE Agricultural Program on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday on SNJ Today AM 1240 at **12:40 pm** announcing local workshops, seminars, and horticultural tips.

From The Desk of Pam Burton

The National Master Gardener Program Coordinator Conference was hosted by New Jersey in 2014 and was held near the Rutgers campus in New Brunswick. Over 30 states were represented in the three day conference which covered a myriad of topics including the use of Social Media in the Master Gardener Program. The capstone speaker was Gary Oppenheimer, Executive Director and Founder of AmpleHarvest.org. His topic was “The Key to Eliminating Food Waste and Hunger in America”. I was proud to share with him what we have done as Rutgers Master Gardeners of Cumberland County at the RAREC harvests.

The Program Coordinators had the opportunity to network with each other and shared some ideas that we can take back to our own counties. I was glad to get the chance to tour the Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science, the Plant Diagnostic Lab, the Holly, Dogwood & Hazelnut Breeding Programs and the Rutgers Gardens.

Each New Jersey county was represented by a poster that highlighted a successful Rutgers Master Gardener project of the Program Coordinator’s choice. Cumberland County showcased the Children’s Learning Table and received many favorable comments. Stop by the Extension Center to see the poster on display and to say “Hi!”.

MASTER GARDENER OVERVIEW

The Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Master Gardener program is a volunteer program offered in New Jersey through Rutgers Cooperative Extension, NJ Agriculture Experiment Station (NJAES), and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, in cooperation with the individual county government. The program is designed to increase the availability of University-based information to local communities and individuals through trained adult volunteers known as Rutgers Master Gardeners.

Program Objectives:

- Expand the research and educational capacity of RCE in order to provide research-based home grounds information through a network of trained volunteers.
- Develop and enhance community programs related to horticulture and environmental stewardship. These programs are educational in nature and may involve environmental improvements, horticultural therapy projects, community and school gardening projects, or other programs as determined by local need.
- The Rutgers Master Gardener Program is a volunteer network designed to assist RCE faculty and staff in managing local Master Gardener activities and programs.

A Master Gardener is an adult 18 and older who has a sincere desire to help others and a strong interest in home grounds, including gardening, horticulture, and the environment. He or she is a member of the local community interested in expanding his or her personal knowledge with a willingness and dedication to serve as a volunteer for Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

The next master gardener class is forming for 2015 and begin in January 2015. Join us and don't miss out on all the great information! Classes open to the public \$20 per person. See attached schedule.

African Violets

Rutgers Master Gardeners of Cumberland County includes leaf propagation of African Violets as a very popular Therapeutic Horticulture class. You've heard me mention my Gram before and again, Gram had many African violets in her home, so this is a therapeutic horticulture project that is one of my favs with memories of my Gram.

To propagate an African violet by leaf cutting, first you will need to gather your materials. You will need a pot with drainage holes as well as soil which is half vermiculite and half potting mix. You will also need an African violet, a sharp knife and a clear plastic bag.

Step one is to fill the container with soil. Then chose a healthy young full sized leaf from the African Violet plant. Cut that stem at an angle with at least 1 to 2 inches of stem below the leaf itself and set the leaf into the pot at an angle. Do this with several leaves in the same pot. Once you are done placing the leaf cuttings into the pot, water thoroughly and allow the excess moisture to fully drain. Place the container with the leaf cuttings into the clear plastic bag and blow into it as you are sealing it tightly so it is puffed up with air. Set the pot in a bright location out of direct sunlight. Roots will form in about one month and at about two months plantlets will form and you can cut off the original leaf. When that occurs you can plant the plantlets into new containers. The continued care of the African Violets is dependent on consistent care and attention to light, temperature, watering, and fertilization.

Generally, African Violets prefer a bright area in your home that does not receive direct sunlight in the afternoon. If that is not possible they do perform well under fluorescent lights. African Violets require temperatures between 65 and 80°F. They may be watered from the top or bottom. When watering from the top, apply enough room temperature water to thoroughly saturate the soil and then drain the excess water from the bottom of the container. To water from below, place the pot in a tray that has about 1 inch of water in it, allow the soil surface of the plant to become moist, then remove the pot and drain the excess water. There are fertilizers on the market which are specifically prepared for African Violets; but be certain to follow the instructions on the labels.

Resources:

Iowa State University; Reiman Gardens; <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/rq322.pdf>

Clemson Cooperative Extension; <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/indoor/flowering/hgic1550.html>

American Larch, Tamarack Tree, *Larix laricina*

The American Larch is the exception to the rule and is a deciduous conifer. That's right you heard correctly. The needles of this tree turn a brilliant yellow before they fall from the tree in winter, leaving for view clusters of small woody cones that are chestnut brown in color and stand away from the tree. Some people think the tree is rather ugly in the winter, but I'm of the opinion that if you are searching for a very different look in decorating this holiday season then the American Larch is for you. I have seen branches adorned with these cones sold in bunches in high end luxury stores for a hefty price tag.

Because of its unique adaptation of losing its' needles the American Larch can be found in cooler climates since it is totally dormant throughout the winter and doesn't bear the brunt of protecting its' needles.

It has a pyramidal shape and can grow to 80 feet in height. I have had the pleasure of seeing a grove of these in a person's home landscaping. In spring the American Larch has lacy-like needles and the grove seemed like the perfect secret garden.

The wood of the American Larch is very hard and is used for fence posts, telegraph poles, and railroad ties and as pulp for making paper. One of its more interesting uses has been as wood on the runners of dog sleds. Our early colonists used the larch for ship building where they harvested the roots that had grown in right angles to make the 'knees' that joined the ribs to the deck timbers. This tree is often overlooked in home landscaping because of its seasonal needle loss and its somewhat sad winter appearance, and it has been reported that in the Civil War era and earlier, "it was common to have one in a town cemetery to symbolize 'death' in the winter and 'rebirth'" in the spring."

If you are lucky enough to have access to an American Larch, harvest some braches to use in your holiday decorating this year.

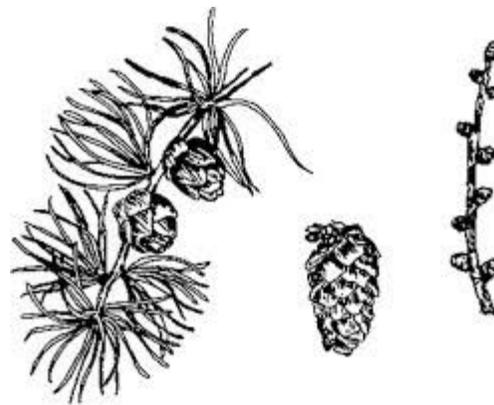
Resources:

University of Wisconsin; http://bioweb.uwlax.edu/bio203/2010/panich_just/Site/Hello.html

University of New Hampshire; https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001640_Rep2943.pdf

Oregon State; http://oregonstate.edu/trees/conifer_genera/larch.html

Cornell University; <http://bhort.bh.cornell.edu/tree/larch.htm>





Canadian geese in the eastern United States

There are two Rutgers Fact Sheets which talk about Canadian Geese and they are FS1214 and FS1217. Based on these fact sheets, the resident Canadian Goose population exceeded 80,000 in a 2002 survey. They have a significant negative impact on both human and ecosystem health by causing agricultural damage, habitat degradation, aircraft strikes, and environmental contamination.

The Fact Sheets beg the question of what can we do about them? Several approaches are detailed in these Fact Sheets with the appropriate disclaimer that no one strategy is completely effective and therefore often methods are integrated in the hopes of maximizing the effectiveness. In order to help control the Canadian goose population it helps to know their preferred habitat and then reduce the attractiveness to them accordingly. One suggestion is to replace turf lawn with tall native vegetation or a mix of perennial wildflowers. Geese prefer to forage on short nutrient rich vegetation in open areas and generally avoid tall vegetation because they cannot easily detect predators. If you cannot plant tall vegetation then opt for a native groundcover instead of a mowed turf. Geese also feed on aquatic vegetation and enjoy open areas along water bodies where they can quickly flee from danger. Therefore if you can plant native vegetation along the water edges it will help deter the geese because they cannot see potential predators when swimming and if there is tall vegetation, they cannot quickly access the water from the land.

I have seen a local farm where predator decoys of coyote were used as a deterrent method. The Fact Sheet indicates that this is a short-term management tool. However I can tell you that they sure do grab your attention as you are driving down the road!

DON'T MOVE Firewood



The weather is cold and snowy and some brave hardy souls may be considering winter camping. No doubt if that's on your agenda you are planning on building a campfire and today we're going to talk about why firewood should be burned near the location it is cut and not transported to campgrounds or parks. We don't think about this as we toast our s'mores by the campfire, but insects can be transported long distances in firewood and introduced into new areas where they become established and kill local trees. There are several wood-infesting species that are of great concern including the Emerald ash borer, Asian Longhorned Beetle and the Gypsy Moth.

So what can you do to help prevent the unintentional spread of these invasive pests and still enjoy the experience of camping? The safest answer is to leave your firewood at home and use only local sources of wood.

The reason is that larvae and pupae can hide beneath the bark of cut wood and then escape as adult beetles after being transported many miles. Additionally the larvae of the Emerald Ash Borer can survive and emerge from firewood for up to two years, and even if your firewood looks okay, even the experts cannot always see the telltale D shaped exit holes of an adult Emerald Ash Borer. People have asked if it's okay to transport firewood if they burn it all completely. The safest answer to that is no given the possibility that a bug could be hitch-hiking on a log and that chip of bark could be the one that accidentally falls to the ground.

It still remains that it's safe to cut your firewood and burn it at home but if you can take these steps and secure your campsite firewood at your destination, you will be doing your part to help take steps to slow the spread of pests and diseases.

Resources:

University of Missouri Extension; <http://extension.missouri.edu/emeraldashborer/firewood.aspx>
 University of Missouri; <http://extension.missouri.edu/emeraldashborer/pdf/FAQfirewood.pdf>

Northern bayberry

Myrica pensylvanica

In our family it is tradition for mom to give me a bayberry candle every year during the holiday season. The folklore is that if you burn a bayberry candle all the way down during the holiday season, you'll have health, wealth and prosperity in the coming year. In fact our early colonists used to say "...A bayberry candle burnt to the socket brings food to the larder and gold to the pocket..."

The bayberry candles are made from the fruits of the bayberry bush, but the plant is useful for more than just the wonderful candles that can be produced from the berries. It is native to eastern United States and makes an excellent informal hedge in the garden. In summer there is the added bonus of fragrant summer foliage providing a dark green background for the herbaceous or mixed border. In fall the gray waxy berries of bayberry are eaten by many bird species, including songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and marsh birds. I love the look of the rustic berries against the leathery texture of the leaves and will often incorporate branches of bayberry into floral designs. The multiple trunks are twisted and gnarly with smooth light grey bark that provides visual appeal. It does have a tendency to sprout from the roots, but in a naturalized garden, thickets of bayberry provide nesting coverage for songbirds and offer excellent protection from raccoons and other nest predators.

This semi evergreen shrub prefers full sun to partial shade and does well on dry, sandy, infertile soils and it usually grows to a height of 10-20 feet. One of the best attributes of this plant is that it is tolerant of salt spray, so it's a good plant choice for bayside landscaping purposes. I have also seen references that suggest it may be adaptable to clay soils. The bayberry has a colonizing habit, and is typically a dioecious shrub, but there are bayberry plants offered in the nursery industry that are monoecious in character.

Bayberry is easy to grow and if you choose this plant for your home landscape, water it well until established and it will require no further care. Sit back and enjoy.

Resources:

University of Florida; http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/database/documents/pdf/tree_fact_sheets/myrpena.pdf

University of Maine; <http://umaine.edu/publications/2572e/>

Ohio State University; <http://plantfacts.osu.edu/pdf/0247-768.pdf>

Purdue University; <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/herbhunters/bayberry.html>

University of Connecticut; <http://www.hort.uconn.edu/plants/m/myrpen/myrpen1.html>



BAYBERRY.



Caring for your Poinsettia

Rutgers Fact Sheet FS449 details "Caring for your Poinsettia". Historically speaking, December 12th is Poinsettia Day, which marks the death of Joel Roberts Poinsett who introduced the plant to the United States from Mexico in 1828. He was the first US Ambassador to Mexico and he sent cuttings of the plant he had found in Southern Mexico, while wandering the countryside, to his home in Charleston, South Carolina.

When selecting your poinsettia chose a compact plant with dark green foliage down to the soil line. Pay special attention to the true flowers which are found in the center of the whorl of colored bracts. If the button-like parts appear green or red-tipped the bloom will hold longer than if they are yellow in color. Generally speaking, the plant should be 2½ times taller than the diameter of the container and should not have yellow leaves. Overcrowding of poinsettia plants for sale can cause premature bract loss. Check the underside of leaves, as well for any unwelcome insects.

Once you purchase your poinsettia make certain that the plant is well wrapped before you take it to your car. Exposure to weather conditions below 50°F can cause injury to the leaves and bracts. When you get home, unwrap the plant immediately to prevent distortion and water if needed.

Keep your plant near a sunny window and make certain no part of the plant is touching the window. Poinsettias don't care for drafts or wide changes in temperatures. Remember they are typically tropical plants and like the temperature to remain between 60° and 70°F.

Watering instructions are important for your poinsettia so check the soil daily and water when the soil is dry to the touch by soaking the soil and draining off the excess water. Too little water will cause the plant to wilt and the lower leaves will drop. Too much water will cause the lower leaves to turn yellow and then drop. By choosing your poinsettia carefully and following the simple care instructions, you will be able to enjoy this traditional plant throughout the entire Holiday season.

Resources:

Michigan State University; http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/vista/html_pubs/point/point.htm

University of Illinois Extension; <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/poinsettia/index.cfm>

Holiday cacti

There are three different types of Holiday cacti: Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter with the Thanksgiving cactus being the most familiar and widely grown species. My gram used to have what we called a Christmas cactus and it was always such fun to see it bloom at this time of year. Rutgers Master Gardeners teaches propagation of Holiday cacti as a Therapeutic Horticulture program.

You can identify the Thanksgiving cactus from the shape of the flattened stem segment which will have 2-4 saw toothed projections along the margin whereas the stem margins of the Christmas cactus are more rounded. The Holiday cactus bloom at the tip of the stem and are available in a wide range of colors. While they are considered cactus, they are not as drought tolerant of other cacti that we are familiar with and should be watered when the top inch or so of soil feels dry to the touch. They enjoy being in a sunny location indoors and like to be a bit potbound with well-drained soil.

In the therapeutic horticulture program, Master Gardeners explain how to pinch off sections of stems with 2-5 stem segments. It's recommended to leave it out overnight to form a callous. It's quite simple to insert the cut end of the stem about 1" deep into moist perlite. Water well and place the container in a clear plastic bag secured with a rubber band around the container. This acts as a mini greenhouse and keeps the humidity high. If excess moisture collects inside the bag, remove the bag and allow it to dry out before replacing the bag over the cuttings and place the container in bright indirect light. It will take approximately 6-8 weeks to root and then you can plant the cuttings in a small container with well-drained soil.

In mid-October begin keeping the Holiday cactus in the dark for about 12 hours a night for about 6-8 weeks and you will enjoy the blooms in time for the Holidays. Even street lights can have an adverse effect on bloom production so a closet may make the best place to keep them from 8 pm until 8 am. Or you can leave them on an unheated porch where the naturally longer nights and cool temperatures in late summer will encourage flower development. Just remember to bring them inside when temperatures get below 50°.

If you are the keeper of the family Christmas cactus, my best word of advice is to make many stem cuttings and share them, so the burden of saving the plant does not all fall to you!

Resources: Purdue University; <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/cactusFAQs.html>

University of Illinois Extension; <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/cfiv/homeowners/111122.html>

Pamphlet from Reiman Gardens, Iowa State University; Growing Holiday cacti; RG 308; Revised 2008

Cole crops



Please note, that is spelled c-o-l-e and not c-o-l-d. While cole and cold sound the same they have different meanings. "Cold" refers to temperature while cole refers to the plants belonging to the Cruciferae or mustard family and are grown for their edible leaves, stalks and flowers. The cole crops include cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, brussel sprouts, collards, kale and kohlrabi. The word cole actually means stem, but it is confusing since these cole crops are cool season vegetables.

Rutgers Fact Sheet FS561 entitled "Growing the Cole Crops in the Home Garden" suggests that for spring cole crops it's best to get a jump on the season by growing transplants. This can be done 4-6 weeks prior to outdoor planting and can be done in a greenhouse, by a sunny window or under fluorescent lights. Cole crop seedlings do not want to be subjected to temperatures below 50°F for more than 10 days. While growing the new plants, you can get a soil test for the outside area where you will be growing your crops. The soil test will indicate the pH of the soil, the level of fertility and recommend appropriate amendments. Soil test kits are available at the Extension Center for \$20.00.

The first line of defense against all insect pests and diseases of cole crops is crop rotation so be sure not to plant cole crops in the same spot year after year. When it comes time to plant cole crops be sure to have mulch on hand. Mulching the cole crops helps with weeding, soil moisture and to minimize plant stress. Slowly soak the soil twice a week for your watering regimen and supplement the rainfall to make sure the crops receive at least one inch of water per week. For specific insect and disease recommendations, call us for publication E079, "New Jersey Vegetable Pest Control Recommendations for Home Gardens".

Not only is growing cole crops fun, but it is also an investment in your health with proteins and vitamins C and A.

Resources:

Texas A & M ; <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/vegetables/colecrop.html>

University of New Hampshire; http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000605_Rep627.pdf

Get your soil tested early

Reasons to get your soil tested early: 1) Avoid the spring rush and any possible delay time in receiving your results, and 2) you don't want to wait until the week before gardening to implement some of the recommendations! Rutgers Fact Sheet FS797 gives comprehensive instructions on Soil Testing for Home Gardens and Lawns. You can either bring your soil to the Extension Office or stop by for a test kit. The kits are \$20 and instructions are included.

Soil tests aid in diagnosing only those troubles that result from a deficiency or an excess of lime and certain plant nutrients. Lime and fertilizer recommendations are provided based on the results of the soil test.

For optimum results a separate sample should be taken for each area that is used for different plants. For instance, samples from the lawn should be taken separately from your vegetable garden. Put another way, the samples should represent only one type of planting. Keep in mind, the soil test can only be as good as the soil sample that is collected. Each sample must be submitted with a corresponding soil test questionnaire. Keep your own records of the sample ID and areas sampled so you will be able to distinguish the samples from each other. Sample areas separately that have received different lime and/or fertilizer treatments in the past and do not sample area that have been limed or fertilized within the past six weeks unless there is an evident problem.

To take a sample, use a trowel or spade to obtain thin vertical slices of soil, from the surface to a depth of 6-7" and put the soil in a clean plastic bucket. Repeat this procedure in 10-15 locations within the sampling area, mixing all the soil in the container and breaking up subsamples and any large clods. The goal is to provide an average soil sample, representative of the area. If the soil is wet, allow it to air-dry by spreading it out on clean paper or plastic. You will need about 2 cups of soil for the soil test.

In completing the form provided with the test be sure to fill out both sides and provide the appropriate information requested including the growing conditions of the area. Unless it is an unusually busy time of the year, you should receive your results within two weeks. A copy of the Soil Test Report is also sent to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension office. Ideally a soil test should be done on the same area every three years.

Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station; <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/soiltestinglab/howto.asp>

Forcing Branches

Get rid of the winter blues by bringing braches in from the cold to force for some early spring promise. There are any number of choices to force including the more commonly thought of shrubs such as forsythia and pussy willow as well as some that might not readily come to mind including cherries, Eastern redbud, lilacs, magnolias, quinces, red maple & serviceberry.

You can start considering forcing branches to bloom when temperatures rise above freezing in late January and February. Select long, thin branches that are healthy, disease and pest free. Six to 18" is a good rule of thumb. It is essential to make certain that the branches have many plump buds and be sure to cut a few more branches than you expect to use in case some don't absorb the water satisfactorily. When cutting the braches, use a sharp blade and cut the branches near a side bud or junction, just as you would when you are pruning the shrub. Consider the overall look and shape of the shrub and try to select branches from crowded spots where they will not be missed.

When you bring the branches indoors, place the cut branches in a container of warm water and make a second cut on a slant just above the previous cut. This will help prevent air from entering the stem through the cut end which might block water uptake. After about 1/2 hour, fill the container with cool water and be sure to change the water every day. Keep the container in a cool partially shaded location and add some floral preservative to help control bacteria.

It can take one to eight weeks for the blossoms to open depending on the natural bloom time. The closer to their natural bloom time that you cut the branches, the sooner they will open. There is a possibility that the branches will root and should that occur remove the branch from the water when the roots are 1/4 to 3/8" long and trim the branch to about 6-8 inches. Pot the branch and keep it moist until permanent roots are formed. When warm weather arrives, enjoy planting your new plant outdoors, but try to provide some protection for 1-2 years.

Resources:

- Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service; <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/ho-23.pdf>
- University of Nebraska; <http://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2008/forceshrubs.shtml>
- University of Delaware; <http://www.udel.edu/udaily/2013/jan/force-blooms-012313.html>
- University of Illinois; <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/forcing/>

Groundhog Day

In this technological day and age, we can become almost overwhelmed with the options available to us for weather forecast and weather predictions. Inevitably there's an app for that.

Many of us as gardeners and in my case, sailors, are dependent on weather conditions for decisions we make in our lives, if not on a daily basis then at least upon occasion. There's nothing worse than thinking you're going to have the perfect weather day for planting in your crop, only to have an unexpected thunderstorm interrupt your plans.

There are many forecasting methods for different weather scenarios and among these include persistence method, key surface features, effects of cloud cover and frontal lifting and these all are explained in very scientific terminology in many different sources available to us using digital technology.

However, there remains at least one meteorologist that does not rely on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube to predict when spring is coming and that is the groundhog. I am writing this report long before the 2nd of February so I don't know whether the prediction will be for 6 more weeks of winter. Celestially speaking, Feb. 2 is a "cross-quarter" day, and is about halfway between the winter solstice in December and the vernal equinox in March. Some cultures celebrate February 2 as the midpoint of winter and it's not far off from when many groundhogs end their hibernation anyway which is around the second week of February. The folklore goes that Punxsutawney Phil, a captive woodchuck held in rural Pennsylvania, is awakened from hibernation in order to determine if he will see his shadow. According to the legend, if he sees his shadow there will be 6 additional weeks of winter. If he does not see his shadow, legend predicts an early spring. The legend of Groundhog Day is likely due to the fact that groundhogs often re-enter hibernation after emerging from their dens prematurely. Groundhogs can have a significant negative impact on humans by destroying gardens, pastures, and agricultural crops. Their burrows have caused damage to farm equipment and building foundations and have caused harm to livestock as well.

- University of Illinois; [http://ww2010.atmos.uiuc.edu/\(Gh\)/guides/mtr/fcst/home.rxml](http://ww2010.atmos.uiuc.edu/(Gh)/guides/mtr/fcst/home.rxml)
- North Carolina State University; <http://www.nc-climate.ncsu.edu/climate/groundhog>

Helleborus

Helleborus makes a fabulous addition to your shade garden and happily blooms in early spring. New growth appears in late January and February followed by 3-4 inch flowers that are now available in a variety of colors. The bloom is likely to last for up to three months.

Helleborus are hardy to zones 4-9 and are easy to grow, for even the most novice of gardeners, providing you give them the conditions that they require in which to thrive. I already mentioned that they are shade lovers, and they do need to be protected from afternoon sun. They also prefer rich, well-drained soil and it helps to incorporate leaf or organic materials at time of plantings. Mulch accordingly in the fall and Helleborus will reward you with being long-lived plants that rarely need dividing and require little maintenance. To enhance plant growth, they can be fertilized with a slow-release fertilizer when new foliage begins to appear in late winter. You can cut back the tattered and rough looking foliage as new leaves emerge, but that is not a requirement. Additionally, in my research I read time and again that Helleborus are naturally resistant to deer and rabbits. Having said that, I must also warn you that all parts of the Helleborus are poisonous.

This evergreen perennial has wonderful dark green coarse-textured foliage which provides winter interest when other perennials are dormant. Helleborus combines very well in the landscape with a variety of other shade loving plants. A companion planting of Helleborus and ferns helps accentuate the differences in foliage textures and colors, while the Helleborus can also provide a beautiful backdrop to spring bloomers such as epimediums. It also combines well with other shade lovers such as impatiens, hostas, azaleas, pieris and skimmia.

One last thought about Helleborus. The flowers can hang just below the foliage, so if your gardening challenge is a shady hillside or slope consider planting Helleborus, so you can enjoy the view from another angle.

Resources:

Clemson University; <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/flowers/hgic1185.html>

Cobb County Extension Service; <http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/cobb/anr/Documents/lentonrose.pdf>

University of Tennessee; http://utgardens.tennessee.edu/pom/lenten_rose.html

Holiday horticulture Traditions

Probably the most obvious is the tradition of a Christmas Tree and evergreens. Christmas trees are believed to symbolize immortality. In the 1500's trees were sold in Germany to be put in homes, undecorated and evergreen boughs were brought into their homes in winter for protection and to return life to the snow-covered forest. In 1747, it was recorded that trees appeared in the United States when people in Pennsylvania decorated wooden pyramids with evergreen branches and candles.

Holly is another standard traditional plant used for holiday decorating. Historically, it was used by ancient Romans to honor Saturn, the god of agriculture during their winter solstice festival. And of course, we all know the tradition that if two people meet under the mistletoe, they are supposed to kiss and that will increase the possibility of marriage in the upcoming year. In ancient times, the Druids believed that mistletoe could bestow health and good luck. It was also thought that a good mistletoe crop foretold a good crop the following season.

I think the tradition I like the best in researching this topic is one that we don't often take the time to do and that is wassailing which is now thought of as the tradition of going from home to home to carol, eat, and socialize with loved ones. Historically, however, wassailing was originally an important part of a horticultural ritual that focused on the apple orchards. The wassail procession caroled and danced around select trees in area orchards then sprinkled cider over the roots of those trees. Incantations were said and guns were fired into the air to frighten away evil spirits. This was all done to salute the trees in the dead of winter to insure a good crop for the coming year. The lore is that the yield of the following year's crop measured the care in which the ceremony was conducted.

Resources:

Alabama Cooperative Extension System; <http://www.aces.edu/counties/Bibb/documents/12.17.08.pdf>

Iowa State University; <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/1995/12-8-1995/trad.html>

University of Nebraska; <http://gage.unl.edu/web/gage/HortHolidayDecorations>

Indoor succulents

At this time of the year when it can be cold and dreary outdoors, a bit of greenery in your house can be a pick-me-up. One of the easiest and low maintenance groups of indoor plants is succulents which have realized an increase in popularity throughout the past several years. Because of their increase in popularity, you can easily find a diverse selection of them in the market place.

Succulents are plants with thick, fleshy leaves or stems which are available in a variety of textures, colors, forms, sizes and growth habits which offers many options for utilizing them in your home. A mature Jade plant can provide a focal point as an individual specimen plant whereas String of Pearls and Succulent Grape make wonderful hanging plants. As an interesting alternative, mix several together using different colors, shape and textures for an unusual container garden.

However you display the succulents, it's very important to choose a porous container with adequate drainage holes and use soil that is one part potting soil to one part sand to allow for good drainage.

For indoor success, the key is a south-facing window with at least one-half day of sunlight. Succulents on the whole require very little water and fertilizer. When watering, let them dry out completely and then water thoroughly allowing the water to flow out the drainage holes. The frequency of watering depends on a number of factors including environment, the specific variety of succulent, and time of year. The succulents prefer room temperature conditions but keep them out of drafts where cold air may cause leaf drop.

If you are in the market for plants that are easy to care for, will make great conversation pieces and have a plethora of diversity, then I suggest you consider succulents for your home interiorscape.

Resources:

North Dakota State University; <http://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/chiwonlee/plsc211/student%20papers/articles11/MarieHagemeister/>

University of Illinois Extension; http://urbanext.illinois.edu/gardenerscorner/issue_02/winter_03_06.cfm

Iowa State University; http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/schoolipm/sites/default/files/school_ipm_2004_01.pdf

Cooperative Ext. Services of the Northeastern States; NE #42; A Northeast Home Horticulture Fact Sheet "Cacti and Succulents" by Hubert P. Conlon, Home Grounds Extension Specialist, University of Rhode Island

Snow as an Insulator

During a Master Gardener Class, Agriculture agent Jim Johnson, was asked what negative impact snow may have on the plants in the ground. The answer was there is no negative impact from snow on plants that are in the ground. In fact the snow acts as an insulator.

To explain in further detail, without the snow, the cold temperatures can freeze deeper into the soil and lead to more damage to the root systems. The root systems of most landscape plants will be injured at soil temperatures below 10° F. For more sensitive perennials injury can occur at soil temperatures just below freezing. The snow provides an insulating effect by not allowing the damage caused by repeated freezing and thawing of temperatures deep into the soils. This also helps prevent frost and heaving as the snow provides insulation from the drying winter sun and extremes in air temperatures and winds. Without the snow plants are subject to alternating freezing and thawing cycles and the milder temperatures and sun could warm the soil surface, leading to soil heaving. We've all experienced the damage done to the roots and plant parts when heaving occurs.

If you decide to help out with Mother Nature, and add snow to your plants, be sure not to compact the snow onto plants and use snow mulch only where you are sure it will melt away easily. Don't pile it up where drainage is poor. Quagmires around the home can lead to waterlogged soils and stressed out plants and homeowners.

The next time we are having bad thoughts about the snow, remember that not only do the landscape plants appreciate this extra layer of covering, but it also helps with the perennials, bulbs, and strawberry plantings, as well.

Resources:

University of Vermont; <http://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/snwinjur.html>; University of Wyoming; http://www.uwyo.edu/barnbackyard/_files/documents/magazine/2012/winter/012012bbsnow.pdf; University of Illinois Extension; http://web.extension.illinois.edu/dkk/eb266/20131210_7765.html; University of Nebraska-Lincoln; <http://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2006/snow.shtml>; Oregon State University Extension Service; <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/snow-or-lack-thereof-effects-landscape-plants>

Wind chill factors

One day during a bout of very cold weather, I was outside playing with my dog and it was windy as well as cold. Even though I had coveralls, a hat and mittens on the tips of my fingers got painfully cold and I was ready to go inside long before my golden retriever was.

The "wind chill factor" makes us feel even colder in winter than the thermometer reads due to the combined interaction of air temperature and wind on a human body that is trying to give off heat. It's noted that winds over 40 mph have little additional chilling effect, but I have to admit that I did not find that fact very comforting. On one table that I looked at it indicated that values of wind chill below -10° F are considered bitterly cold and values of wind chill below -20° F are extremely cold. In fact human flesh will begin to freeze within one minute since the combined effect of the wind and the temperature determines the rate at which your body loses heat!

The wind chill factor or index is an indicator of how you should dress before you venture outside. It's suggested that dressing in loose fitting, lightweight layers of warm clothing will help entrap insulated air that is warmed by body heat. Wear outergarments that are tightly woven and water repellent and be sure to add a hat and mittens that are snug at the wrist versus finger gloves. If your clothing is wet, evaporation of that moisture will greatly increase the chill factor. I had all the layers, the proper outdoor wear and a hat and mittens on the other morning and still I was very uncomfortable, so use your common sense and don't remain outdoors for extended periods of time, even if your dog begs for one more round of throwing the ball.

Resources:

Montana State University <http://www.montana.edu/ahporter/heat-and-wind.html>

University Corporation for Atmospheric Research <http://www.ucar.edu/communications/factsheets/chill.html>

University of Illinois http://mste.illinois.edu/dildine/wind_chill/

Galanthus nivalis, Snowdrops

Galanthus nivalis, Snowdrops are a spring-flowering ephemeral bulb that is a harbinger of spring as it peeks through the snow in late winter. The word Galanthus comes from the Greek words gala which means milk and anthis which means flowers referring to its color and shape. This is an heirloom plant with its origins circa 1875 and is native to Europe.

Snowdrops have fresh green foliage with delicate pure white flowers that hang down and can be used as cut flowers, despite their short stems. They are hardy in zones 3 to 9 they generally grow 6 inches or less and they prefer cool, moist partially shaded but well drained areas.

Snow drops are an easy perennial to grow and while they form clumps they do not spread aggressively. Plant them as bulbs about 2-3 inches deep and about 2 to 4 inches apart and do not let the bulbs dry out. Don't disturb them for several years which will encourage better blooms. You can divide the plants in spring when the clumps become overcrowded, which may be every 3 to 4 years. It's best to divide or separate the clumps while "in the green" which means before the leaves start to wither and include quite a bit of soil attached to the roots as you divide the snowdrops. Snow drops make a wonderful naturalizing plant to use in a cool moist and shady area. Share them with your neighbors, relatives and friends!

Resources:

Cornell University; <http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/homegardening/scene4bcd.html>

University of Washington Botanic Gardens; <http://depts.washington.edu/uwbg/news/tag/winter-garden/>

Cobb County Extension Service; <http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/cobb/anr/Documents/snowdrops.pdf>

Garden Tips for December

- Select a live or cut Christmas tree while the selection is good. Keep the tree outdoors until it is time to decorate it.
- Keep your Christmas tree stand filled with water.
- Keep poinsettias out of cold drafts and away from heat sources. Please them where they will get as much light as possible.
- Popcorn and cranberry garlands are easy to make.
- Cover or move indoors any stone statuary to prevent frost cracks.
- Protect furniture from the sap of fresh, needled evergreen boughs when decorating for the holidays.
- Don't let dried evergreen decorations become a fire hazard.
- Trim an outdoor evergreen tree with treat for wildlife.
- If you're considering the native American holly for your landscape, please be advised that it will grow to 40-50 feet in height with a spread of 18-40 feet.
- Salt used to melt ice on sidewalks and driveways can damage plants and lawns.
- Begin planning your garden as the seed catalogs arrive in the mail. Try a few new plants next year.
- Evaluate your landscape. Plant to fill in gaps with appropriate plants in the spring.
- Gather holiday greens from your landscape but prune carefully. Spray the greens with an antidesiccant to retard water loss.
- After the ground freezes, mulch shrubs and perennials with straw, pine needles or branches of the discarded Christmas tree to prevent heaving of the plants during periods of freezing and thawing.
- Rake up any leaves remaining on the lawn.
- Avoid walking on the lawn once the ground is frozen.
- Begin bringing in some bulbs potted for forcing. Put them in a cool location with bright light.
- Plant your live Christmas tree as soon as possible after Christmas.
- Feed the birds.
- Rotate houseplants to achieve even growth.
- Keep succulents and cacti on the dry side.
- Do not feed houseplants during the winter months and reduce the watering.
- Raise the humidity for your houseplants by grouping them together.
- Water houseplants with warm water.
- Relax with a good gardening book.
- Plants make nice holiday gifts.
- Have a nice December!

Gardening Tips for January

- Cut up the Christmas tree and use branches as mulch over perennials and around shrubs.
- Feed and water birds regularly. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts and bread crumbs as well as bird seed. They won't even complain if the food is stale.
- Move the most tender plants away from windows on cold nights.
- Your live Christmas tree should be in a cool location for no more than a week before planting.
- Inspect stored bulbs and discard those that are rotting.
- Salt on sidewalks and driveways can injure nearby lawns and plants. Try sawdust or sand instead. Cat litter works well if you haven't obtained the less expensive materials.
- Make plans for your spring and summer gardens.
- Check out the new offerings from mail order companies. Make sure plants are hardy for this area before ordering.
- Mealy bugs on house plants can be killed by touching them with cotton dipped in alcohol.
- Economical "sticky stakes" for trapping whiteflies and aphids can be made by cutting yellow cardboard or plastic, such as detergent bottles or margarine tubs, into strips. Coat with petroleum jelly. Insert into pots or hang near problem areas.
- Inspect perennial beds for heaved plants during warm periods. Mulch around heaved plants. Don't push them into the soil! Dig and replant them in the spring.
- Your local delicatessen or fast food restaurant often has surplus 5-gallon plastic buckets. This is a good size for growing containerized plants and for general use in the garden.
- Start forcing shrubs indoors.
- Limit traffic on dormant lawns; grass is easily broken now and crowns may be severely damaged or killed.
- Check germination of leftover seeds.
- As you look through seed catalogs, choose disease-resistant varieties. They make gardening easier and they reduce the expense of pesticides.
- Some mail order seed companies offer pelletized seeds of lettuce, carrot and a few other small-seeded crops. Pelletized seeds have a special coating to make them larger and easier to handle.
- One way to file seeds as they come in the mail is to use index card tabs to divide a cardboard file box into categories for each vegetable or flower. As new seeds arrive, place them alphabetically into the proper slot. Drop notes into the file to remind yourself what is on order to avoid duplication.
- Remove bagworms from evergreens.
- Buy yourself a house plant. The Hedera helix, English Ivy is the only ivy that will survive indoors. Its leaves grow in fair light or a north/east window. Provide constant moisture to prevent leaf drop. Ivy tolerates drafts near doors.
- Consider using ferns in shady areas of your landscape this year.
- How energy efficient is your landscape? Do you have evergreen trees or shrubs blocking a window where the sun's warmth would be welcome now? Consider replacing them with a deciduous plant that would let sun in during the winter but cast cooling shade in the summer.
- When dusting the furniture, consider washing the dust from your houseplants.
- Perform a soil test. Contact your local Extension Office to inquire about soil testing.
- The flower for January is the carnation.
- Have a Happy and Healthy New Year!

Gardening Tips for February



- Have your lawn mower and rototiller serviced.
- Take stock of leftover seeds. Get them organized and do some germination testing if they're more than a few years old or if storage conditions have not been cool and dry. Even under ideal storage conditions, some vegetable seeds have a fairly short life and probably will not be good one or two years after purchase. These include sweet corn, onion and parsnip.
- Purchase new cool-white fluorescent bulbs for your indoor grow lights.
- If the soil dries out against a house under the eaves where rain rarely reaches, water well during a thaw to prevent loss of plants. Remember that plants require water during the winter to replace water lost due to wind desiccation and lack of rain or snow.
- Make final plans for the annual and vegetable gardens and get the seeds ordered soon. A frequently overlooked factor in vegetable garden planning is the date of the family vacation.
- Choose planting dates and varieties carefully so your garden won't be ready for a full harvest when you are out of town.
- Look for sales on fertilizer, seed starting supplies, tools and organic mulches.
- Get your hand tools organized and sharpened. Check the handles on shovels and hoes to make sure they are firmly attached.
- Branches of forsythia, pussy willow, spirea and dogwood can be forced for indoor bloom. Make long, slanted cuts when collecting the branches and place the stems in a vase of water. Change the water every four days. They should bloom in about three weeks.
- For something unique to force for winter flower arrangements, consider red maple, buckeye, birch, hickory, larch or oak branches.
- Repot your houseplants. Check them closely for insects.
- Plan a perennial border. Particularly good choices for a cutting garden are daisy, dahlia, aster, gladiolus and lily.
- Mulch perennials that have been heaved from the soil. Replant them in the spring.
- Miniature roses can be a colorful addition to your landscape. They range from pure white to golden yellow to dark red. They grow well in containers and planters or they can be used as a low-growing border or mixed in beds/borders with other perennials.
- Make labels for your spring garden. Plastic milk jugs or bleach bottles cut in strip 1" by 6 to 7" work well. Use permanent ink markers to write on them.
- Continue to feed the birds.
- Have you had a soil sample analyzed within the past few years? Soil sampling packets are available at your local Extension office.
- Give a living plant as a present for Valentine's Day.
- If you're anxious to get some seeds started, plant onion and leek seeds indoors anytime this month.
- The flower of the month is the violet.
- Get ready for spring! It will be here next month.

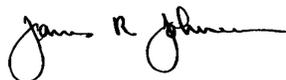


Rutgers Cooperative Extensions Fact Sheets

FS #	Fact Sheet Name
Fact Sheet 19	How to Hire a Tree Care Professional
Fact Sheet 34	Build Bird nest Boxes
Fact Sheet 35	Build Brush Piles for Wildlife
Fact Sheet E60	Indoor Care of Christmas Trees
Fact Sheet 74	Backyard Leaf Composting
Fact Sheet 117	Using Leaf Compost
Fact Sheet 128	Forcing hardy Bulbs Indoors
Fact Sheet 235	Two Spotted Spider Mites
Fact Sheet E271	Landscape Plants rated by Deer Resistance
Fact Sheet E272	Weed Management in Ornamental Plantings (\$1.50)
Fact Sheet 389	Minimizing Waste Disposal: Grass Clippings
Fact Sheet 449	Caring for Your Poinsettia
Fact Sheet 797	Soil Testing for Home Lawns and Gardens
Fact Sheet 805	Vermicomposting
Fact Sheet 811	Home Composting
Fact Sheet 849	Cover Crops and Green Manure
Fact Sheet 930	Natural Pest Control
Fact Sheet 944	Roses and Their Care
Fact Sheet 1022	Backyard Birdfeeders
Fact Sheet 1118	Rain Barrels Part 2: Installation and Use
Fact Sheet 1150	African Violet Care
Fact Sheet 1151	Hollies for New Jersey
Fact Sheet 1154	Orchids on the Windowsill
Fact Sheet 1156	Keeping Geraniums over Winter
Fact Sheet 1163	Mail Order Vegetable Seed Sources for the NJ Gardener
Fact Sheet 1178	Help! My Refrigerator or Freezer Stopped Working. Is my Food Safe?

Call 856/451-2800 x4 ask for Pam Burton. When calling to request a fact sheet refer to the Fact Sheet by FS# or by name. All fact sheets are free unless otherwise noted.

What's Growing On is prepared by Pam Burton, Horticultural Assistant, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cumberland County.



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For important announcements concerning the Cumberland County Extension Center visit:
<http://Cumberland.njaes.rutgers.edu>

Visit the newly activated website to see what activities are happening in the
Home Horticulture and Agriculture Departments.

If you have any questions concerning the website, please call our office at
856-451-2800 x1 for agriculture and
856-451-2800 x4 for Home Horticulture and Master Gardeners

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