Horticulture 2013 Newsletter
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Video of the Week: Cleaning Extends the Life of Garden Tools

Final Newsletter of the Season

This will be the last issue of Horticulture 2013. The first issue of Horticulture 2014 will be sent on January 7.

Your current subscription for the newsletter will continue as is, so nothing will be necessary on your part to continue receiving it. Please tell anyone you know who might be interested in subscribing that they are encouraged and welcome to do so by sending an e-mail to Ward Upham at wupham@ksu.edu requesting a subscription.

We will be sending a very short survey in a few days asking for feedback on the newsletter. This will help us fine-tune our articles to better meet the needs of our subscribers.

On behalf of all of us at K-State we wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. (Ward Upham)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Great Plains Growers Conference
January 9, 10 & 11, 2014
St. Joseph, MO
http://www.greatplainsgrowers.org/GPVGC2014.html

Retail Works: Spring Training for Garden Centers
January 29, 2014
Manhattan, KS
http://retailworks.weebly.com/

FLOWERS

Poinsettia History

I’m going out on a limb here, talking about a floriculture crop (since I’m a nursery specialist), but ‘tis the season to talk about jolly things. Poinsettia plants certainly are jolly, aren’t they? Their bright red bracts (modified leaves) are so bright and colorful that they’ve become an integral part of the holiday season. In fact,
Franciscan monks who settled near the native habitat (Taxco, Mexico) of *Euphorbia pulcherrima* first used them in nativity processions in the 17th century. There, they are very large deciduous shrubs, reaching up to 15 feet in height. It wasn’t until 1825 that poinsettias were introduced to the U.S. market. Joel Poinsett, a skilled botanist who happened to be the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, brought plants back to his home in Greenville, South Carolina and shared them with botanical gardens and horticultural friends. The rest is history.

In 1902 Albert Ecke, an immigrant from Germany, began a cut-flower business in California. Soon (1909ish) he started to specialize in poinsettias and the company has since become world renowned as expert in poinsettia production. They are a generous company, producing numerous books and guides for growing poinsettias. Because they are willing to share their knowledge and production tools, they have become the go-to supplier for poinsettia cuttings around the world.

In a nutshell, growing a poinsettia crop is a complex task. Stock plants, from which un-rooted cuttings are collected, are housed at huge greenhouse operations in Mexico and Central America. Then, much like our cut flower discussion last February, they are delivered to local growers in the U.S. within 48 hours. In July. That’s right, your beautiful Christmas poinsettia started production about five months ago. They’re picky, too. If the humidity, light, temperature, and nutrition aren’t just right, you get sick or strange-looking plants. No one will buy a sick or strange-looking poinsettia!

Did you know that poinsettia plants didn’t really become popular until about 20 years ago? It’s true. Until 1963, poinsettias were only grown as cut flowers but new breeding resulted in potted plant production in 1964. Soon, new colors (other than red) were released into the market (seven in 1968). Improved durability and long shelf-life were also important breeding considerations. In the early 1990s, novelty cultivars began to take off in popularity. Now, in 2013, Paul Ecke Ranch, Inc., offers 65 different cultivars of poinsettia cuttings with an additional eight for trial only…and they retired four cultivars. With names like Enduring™ Pink, Freedom™ Jingle Bells, Red Velvet™, Shimmer™ Surprise!, Snowcap, Sparkling Punch, Orange Spice™, Peppermint Twist™, and Visions of Grandeur™ how can you not get excited about a poinsettia?

While red is by far the most preferred poinsettia color, there are so many to chose from that you should definitely try at least one new one each year. I’m particularly intrigued by ‘Plum Pudding’ and hope I find one this year. Don’t worry about cats and dogs (and children, for that matter) being poisoned if they eat a poinsettia—chalk that one up to urban legend—the worst that could happen is some mild irritation.

As a last note, toss your poinsettia on the compost pile after the holidays with no guilt. They are far too persnickety to keep alive and color up again next year (not to say that it can’t be done…just too much work for me!). If they are exposed to temperatures 50°F or below, they are toast (keep them in sleeves when getting in and out of the car). Too much heat can cause them to decline as well. The list goes on and on. For more information about poinsettia care, check out [urbanext.illinois.edu/poinsettia](http://urbanext.illinois.edu/poinsettia). Enjoy the holidays and don’t forget to waste some time with the people you love! (Cheryl Boyer)
**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Care of Gift Fruit Baskets**

A holiday tradition is to give gifts of fruits and nuts (along with other products). Usually these are placed in an attractive basket, wrapped with cellophane covering, and brought (or shipped) to your house. It is important that the fruit contained inside is kept in cool conditions to maintain its quality for as long as possible. Thus, it is wise to disassemble the fruit basket as soon as you receive it and place the fruit in refrigerated storage. If all the products in the basket are tree fruits (such as apples, pears, oranges or grapefruit), you can place the entire basket in a cool place- around 40 degrees F for best results. If the basket contains any bananas or other tropical fruits (with the exception of citrus) remove those fruits and store them separately. About 3-4 weeks is about as long as you can expect to store these fruits without some shriveling and loss of crispness. (Ward Upham)

**What to Do With the Christmas Tree After Christmas**

After the holidays, many municipalities allow old Christmas trees to be placed curbside. Trees are then collected and ground up for mulch or burned. If you miss the designated date, or your trash collector doesn't accept trees, there are several options to prolong the useful life of the tree.

An old Christmas tree can be used to benefit birds, fish, and the landscape by placing it in a corner of your deck, and spreading some birdseed nearby, or tying it to a deciduous tree or post near a bird feeder. The birds benefit from having escape cover nearby when hawks or cats threaten, and the dense boughs reduce the windchill on a cold night.

Sinking your Christmas tree in a pond is an easy way to improve fish habitat and fishing. The tree serves as little coral reef, in that the branches provide substrate for water plants to grow, and cover for minnows and other forms of small aquatic life. Larger fish are drawn by the shade and the presence of prey.

How do you sink a tree? Tie the base to a cinder block with a short, stout rope, and toss it in. Just be sure to get permission from the pond owner first! Using the little tree around the landscape requires clipping off all of the branches. Use the boughs to add extra insulation around semi-hardy perennials or to trees and shrubs that were recently planted. The leftover trunk may be used as a garden stake next spring. Or cut and let it dry for a few weeks, and you will have some easy lighting firewood. Just beware that most conifer species tend to spark and pop more
than hardwoods, as resin pockets in the wood make tiny explosions. This can delight the youngsters, but for safety’s sake, keep an eye on the fire when burning Christmas tree logs! (Charlie Barden)

Ice Melters

There are five main materials that are used as chemical de-icers: calcium chloride, sodium chloride (table salt), potassium chloride, urea, and calcium magnesium acetate. Calcium chloride is the traditional ice-melting product. Though it will melt ice to about -25 degrees F, it will form slippery, slimy surfaces on concrete and other hard surfaces. Plants are not likely to be harmed unless excessive amounts are used.

Rock salt is sodium chloride and is the least expensive material available. It is effective to approximately 12 degrees F but can damage soils, plants and metals. Potassium chloride can also cause serious plant injury when washed or splashed on foliage. Both calcium chloride and potassium chloride can damage roots of plants.

Urea (carbonyl diamide) is a fertilizer that is sometimes used to melt ice. Though it is only about 10% as corrosive as sodium chloride, it can contaminate ground and surface water with nitrates. Urea is effective to about 21 degrees F.

Calcium magnesium acetate (CMA), a newer product, is made from dolomitic limestone and acetic acid (the principal compound of vinegar). CMA works differently than the other materials in that it does not form a brine like salt but rather helps prevent snow particles from sticking to each other or the road surface. It has little effect on plant growth or concrete surfaces. Performance decreases below 20 degrees F.

Limited use of any of these products should cause little injury. Problems accumulate when they are used excessively and there is not adequate rainfall to wash or leach the material from the area. Since limited use is recommended it is best to remove the ice and snow by hand when possible. When they are applied, practice moderation. Resist the temptation to over apply just to make sure the ice and snow melts. Keep in mind this can damage concrete surfaces as well as the plants and grass growing along the walks and driveways. These problems are normally latent and do not show up until spring or summer. (Ward Upham)

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To view Upcoming Events: http://tinyurl.com/fswqe

The web version includes color images that illustrate subjects discussed. To subscribe to this newsletter electronically, send an e-mail message to cdipman@ksu.edu or wupham@ksu.edu listing your e-mail address in the message.