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Lawn and Garden



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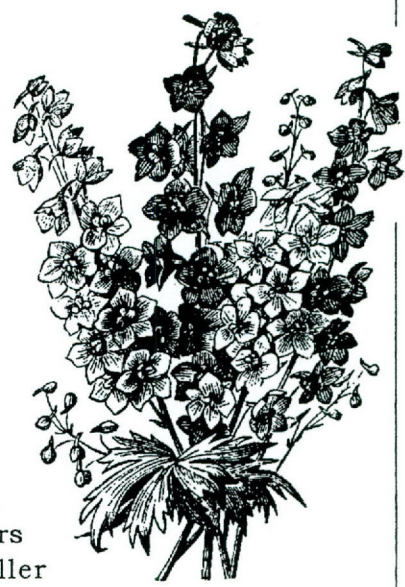
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1999

COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

November/December Plant of the Month

LARKSPUR

Delphinium grandiflorum



By Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist

Larkspurs have naturalized in nearly all areas of Texas and are known for their tall spikes of blue or purple flowers. Pink, white, and double forms are also available, but the seed seems to revert to the dark blue or purple single form after a few years.

Larkspurs are fall-seeded annuals that prefer to be left in place after germination. They are spectacular and easily grown. A sunny location and well-drained soil of moderate fertility are the major requirements. Thinning the seedlings in mid winter to about 8 to 10 inches apart will usually result in an impressive display of individual plants that can reach 3 to 4 feet tall. Like poppies and other fall-planted annuals, larkspurs usually need little supplemental irrigation, since they complete their life cycle during our naturally cool, moist seasons.

Whether seed is collected or allowed to fall and naturally germinate in the garden, it is important to remember that modern hybrid varieties often do not come true from open pollinated seed. Seed saved from many of these modern types may have

little resemblance to the original flower. Large and double flowers may return as smaller single types, and bright colors may tend to be more muted.

Annuals that reseed and return year after year can be as valuable as perennials to the garden. There is something special about these plants that like your garden so well that they choose to come back each year for another visit. In addition to convenience and economy, reseeding annuals such as larkspurs often add charm and special character, since they frequently come up in places where we may not have planted them, adding informality and spontaneity to the garden. Since larkspurs respond well to cultivation and fertilization, it may be necessary to work the soil and add organic material and fertilizer after the seed has fallen. This cultivation process may destroy some of the seeds by planting them too deeply, but there is usually a

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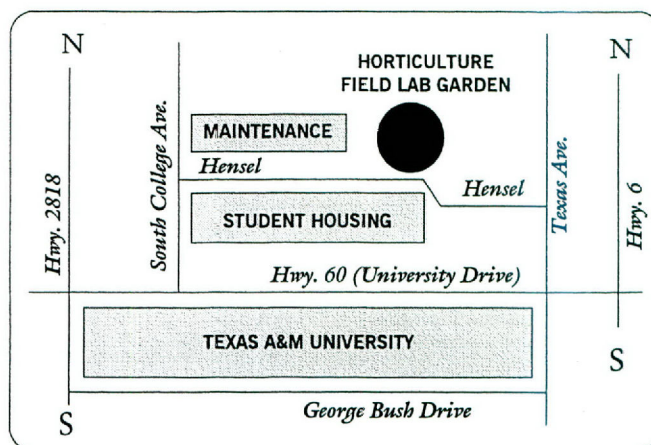
Plants of Interest Now at the TAMU Horticultural Gardens & Field Laboratory

By Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist

The TAMU horticultural gardens at College Station (Zone 8b) had a light frost in the first week of November, but many tender summer- and fall-bloomers will still produce for a while longer, especially those in more sheltered areas. Even though it is now coming into the winter season, there is still plenty to see.

Frost has wilted the leaves of the various types of ornamental gourds, but the gourds themselves will continue to cure till dried. The brugmansias, lantanas, and verbenas have recovered from the summer's heat and are putting on a show of color. Castor bean variety 'Carmencita' is at its peak of color, with large, red-blooming clusters. The ornamental striped corn and sugarcane varieties are at full size. The violet-tinted sugarcane I brought back from Hilton Head, S.C. last year as a medium-sized clump has grown in one season into a large and interesting planting. The semi-tropical yellow jasmine (*Cestrum aurantiacum*) and 'Blue Sky Flower' vine (*Thunbergia grandiflora*) are still very attractive. The vines of hyacinth bean, (*Dolichos lablab*) look better than ever, with purple flowers and dark red pods. Lobelia and perennials such as ageratum (*Eupatorium Wrightii*), marigolds, obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), firespike (*Odontonema stricta*), VIP petunia, angelonia, copper plant, cigar plant and salvias such as Mexican bush sage (*S. leucantha*), autumn sage (*S. gregii*), and Philippine Violet (*Barleria cristata*) will continue to bloom, while various garden chrysanthemums and asters, which are mixed with yellow Mexican marigold mint (*Tagetes lucida*), take over, to be replaced by pansies, dianthus (pinks), stocks, snapdragons, cyclamens, and alyssum as we progress into winter.

The old antique and China roses, including the bush form of Cecile Brunner and a rare antique Bengal rose from the Chelsea Physic Garden in England,



have come into a new bloom cycle, and can be at their most attractive at this time of year. An heirloom, a yet-to-be-identified rose from the Segrest family of College Station, is proving to have good qualities for success in this area. Orange bulbine has already begun to repeat-bloom and will do so periodically through a mild winter.

An interesting plant in the TAMU garden is the spotted emu bush from Australia (*Eremophila maculata*), with showy shrimp-shaped forsythia-like blooms in shades of reddish-pink/yellow. A popular plant in Southern California, it has been successful for the past five years here in the garden, but is only marginally hardy from USDA zone 8b downwards. The shrubby cassias *C. corymbosa* and *C. splendida* are covered in a mass of yellow flowers, and will soon be followed by the red autumn shades of the Chinese pistache trees.

Grasses have proved to be very popular the last few years in the garden. The various bluestems and Muhly grasses have inflorescences that provide both structural interest as well as good dried-plant material. The miscanthus grasses such as *M. sinensis* 'Morning Light' with attractive, curly stem ends, 'Silver Arrow' with cream colored stripes, and the larger-sized *M. condensatus* 'Cosmopolitan' are fall bloomers that will last through the winter. Purple fountain grass will be spectacular until hard freezes.

Site Preparation for Fruit Tree Planting

By Dr. Larry A. Stein, Associate Professor & Extension Horticulturist

Before a fruit tree is planted, there must be adequate space. Most fruit trees require an area 25 feet by 25 feet; dwarfs need about 12 feet by 12 feet. The site must have full sun. And, a single peach tree can easily produce two bushels of fruit -- about one hundred pounds -- so don't plant too many fruit trees for your needs.

Fruit trees are best planted in mid-winter to allow time for root development prior to spring growth. During the months prior to planting, the site should have been prepared as follows: clear the site of perennial weeds, and till an area at least 4 feet by 4 feet well. Any hard pan (layer) beneath the soil should be broken up. Level the site, and till again. Organic matter may be added to the planting area, but it is unnecessary, and never add fertilizer. To allow for soil water drainage, the site may be built up so that the tree will be sitting on a small berm. Seed the site in annual rye grass.

At planting time [January is best], kill the rye grass berm area with glyphosate herbicide (the dead root channels from the rye grass allow for better water intake in the planting area). Plant the tree in the

middle of the killed sod area in a hole as big as the root system, usually about 12 inches square, and at least 18 inches deep. Plant the tree and refill the soil to the same depth that the tree grew in at the nursery, being careful the tree does not settle too deep. In April or May, as the grass greens up, spray 3 or 4 feet around the base of the tree with glyphosate herbicide. It is critical that this be done if the tree is to perform well; if you do little else, maintain this weed-free circle around the tree, and the tree will do better than if nothing at all is done.

The best tree to plant is the variety adapted to and recommended for your area. Select mid-size trees; they are cheaper and grow better than the larger trees. And, it is far easier to cut 3- to 4-foot trees back to 18 to 24 inches, than to prune 5- to 6-foot trees. Such strong cutback is necessary to remove apical dominance, put the top in balance with a reduced root system, and force out strong vigorous shoots which are easy to train. The trees should have healthy white roots with no brown streaks. Also check for borer presence or damage. With proper care, it is highly possible for your fruit tree to fruit the second year after planting.

Landscape Design Study Course III -- January 2000

Part III of the Landscape Design Study Course series will be held January 17-19, 2000 at the Brazos Center in Bryan, Texas, under the supervision of Dr. William C. Welch, Professor and Extension Landscape Horticulturist. This is a series designed to provide familiarity with the principles of landscape design to the public, particularly to Master Gardeners and Garden Club members, nurserymen, civic leaders, and municipal planners from all over Texas. There will be lectures on subjects such as Conservation of Natural Resources, Development of Landscape Architecture 1840s to 1940s, Landscape Design Management (Maintenance), Small Parks and Playgrounds, Color in the Landscape, Landscape Architecture Accessories, Standards for Evaluating Landscape Design, and a special-interest talk on Attracting Birds to the Landscape by Charles Fryling, author of a recent book on the subject. Three of the participating lecturers are from the Louisiana State University School of Landscape Architecture in Baton Rouge.

Cost of the course will be \$55.00. For further details on the course, including registration forms and information on lodging, call Dr. Welch's Extension Horticulture office at (409) 845-7342.

Deck the Halls with Holiday Herbs

This article by Susan Wittig Albert appeared in "homegrown", November/December 1998.*



With the holidays coming up, it is almost time to think about cooking those festive holiday foods, and putting up the decorations the whole family loves. Texans who grow their own herbs (or harvest a few plants from a neighbor's garden) can enjoy a special celebration at the Christmas season, for many of the plants which flourish in our yards and gardens have played an important role in many holiday traditions, from our American Thanksgiving to the ancient Yule.

The Holly and the Ivy -- Mistletoe, too!

Christmas decorations can be traced to a Roman custom of sending a gift of boughs to friends during the festival of the Saturnalia, held in the middle of December to celebrate the winter solstice. The Druids, too, brought boughs into their homes -- specifically holly, intertwined with evergreen ivy -- an invitation to the spirits of nature to share their fire-warmed homes during the harsh winter. Early Christians adopted the pagan practice of bringing boughs indoors at Christmas. Because of its symbolism, holly was one of the favorites. An early legend says that the holly first sprang up in the footprints of Christ, and its thorny leaves and scarlet berries have been thought to symbolize Christ's sacrifice.

Our Texas native holly (*Ilex opaca*) grows best in the piney woods of East Texas, but with extra watering, it should do well elsewhere. The Druids probably wouldn't recognize our native Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), but its red berries make it a wonderful addition to holiday garlands. You've never thought of holly as an herb? For centuries, it has had several important medicinal uses, particularly in the treatment of pleurisy and rheumatism.

Ivy, too, is an herb that is associated with the festive season. Twined with sprigs of holly and branches of fir, it makes a beautiful wreath. Ivy

was once used medicinally; an eleventh-century herbal recommends the use of soft ivy twigs stewed in butter to relieve sunburn. In various folk traditions, the leaves and stems have been used to treat cancer, relieve dysentery, and ease rheumatism.

The herb mistletoe has also held a special place in holiday ritual. The Druids, believing that it protected them from evil, used a sacred knife to gather it on the sixth day of the moon, then sent it around the village to announce the coming of the new year. It was hung in the doorway, and those who walked under it exchanged a kiss of peace, symbolizing their

hope for harmonious relations all year long. To celebrate this tradition, you can create a mistletoe ball: a ball cut from florist's foam, soaked in water, and then poked with mistletoe leaves and berries, and decorated

with red ribbon (keep it moist in the refrigerator until you are ready to hang it). Mistletoe was used by early physicians as a treatment for epilepsy and other convulsive disorders; because of its tendency to reduce blood pressure, it has also been used in the treatment of cardiac disease. Be careful with the berries though -- eaten in large quantities, they can be fatal.

A Wreath of Rosemary

Of all herbs, rosemary -- the symbol of remembrance -- is the one most people associate with Christmas. Legend has it that the Virgin Mary, during the flight into Egypt, washed her cloak and spread it on a rosemary bush to dry. The plant's white flowers turned a heavenly blue -- the blue of Mary's mantle.

Fashioned into lush green wreaths or tied with bits of ribbon into garlands with bay, holly, mistletoe,

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and ivy, rosemary was used to decorate the halls of the rich and the cottages of the poor. The traditional boar's head, the centerpiece of the Renaissance holiday feast, was crowned with a garland of rosemary, its green tips bright with gold gilt. Earlier yet, in medieval times, a lover who wished his lady to remember him might offer her a spring of rosemary tied with red silk ribbons. (Recently, scientists have learned that there is more to the memory business than just a bit of tradition. The leaves contain a chemical that stimulates the brain. German physicians are using it to treat patients with Alzheimer's disease.)

Here in Texas, there is no excuse for not having enough rosemary to deck the halls in royal fashion. The plant, in either its upright or prostrate form, flourishes in most parts of the state. "Arp" (named for the North Texas town where it was found in 1972 by Texas herbalists Madalene Hill and Gwen Barclay) is especially winter-hardy. Rosemary thrives in alkaline soil, and can grow to 5 feet in height. A special plus: deer don't like it.

My favorite use of rosemary for the holidays is as a fragrant wreath around a punch bowl or glass compote dish filled with votive candles. I use a large plastic saucer from a planting pot, arrange wet chunks of florist foam around it, and create my wreaths with 6- to 8-inch springs of fresh rosemary, interspersed with trailing ivy and pieces of holly, and accented with a red bow. If I keep the wreath watered, it stays green for a month.

Susan Wittig Albert is the author of the China Bayles herbal mysteries. "Chile Death" is the latest in the series. Under the pseudonym of Robin Paige, she and her husband Bill Albert write Victorian mysteries. The most recent is "Death at Devil's Bridge." The Alberts live and garden near Bertram, Texas. Visit them at <mysterypartners.com> on the web.

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Larkspur (Continued from Page 1)

sufficient number remaining to provide plenty of plants for the next season.

A frequent problem with reseeding annuals is overgermination and, therefore, crowding, to the point that plants cannot grow and produce properly. This requires careful observation in the garden to check on young seedlings so that when they reach a size large enough, they may be transplanted or thinned. Most young seedlings may be successfully transplanted when they put on their second set of leaves. Some annuals, such as poppies and larkspurs, are somewhat difficult to transplant and do best when thinned and allowed to mature where they germinated.

Young seedlings of flowering annuals may show little resemblance to the mature plants and be very difficult to distinguish from weeds. This requires practice and patience until the young seedlings of desired annuals become familiar. It also implies that most preemergent herbicides and heavy mulches cannot be used in areas where reseeding annuals are desired. The mulches and herbicides are just as effective in controlling the desirable annuals as they are the weeds.

After larkspurs have completed their flowering season in late spring, they may be replaced with hot-season annuals, such as globe amaranth (bachelor's button), periwinkles, celosias, or purslanes.

Texas Pecan Yard Trees

*By George Ray McEachern, Professor and Extension Horticulturist
September 21, 1999*

Pecans are as much a part of Texas as cows, cotton, and oil. Since the first settlers discovered their fine flavor and food value, respect and love of pecans has continued. From the very beginning of Texas, pecans have been a special part of every fall and winter party, church dinner, special treat, and holiday. Early settlements along Texas rivers were on the receiving end of one of nature's special gifts to man. In much of Texas, pecan trees are the best form of shade, they are beautiful, and they produce nuts which taste great and provide a good source of energy.

We have to take our hats off to Governor Hogg for starting the movement which resulted in the pecan becoming the state tree of Texas. As a result of his deathbed appreciation of the pecan, Texans became aware that they had a living treasure, and have since made it special. The pecan has, thus, become a favorite yard tree in every county in Texas.

Many homesteads and communities with deep, well drained soil and water for irrigation are recognized for the large number of pecans as yard trees. San Saba, Seguin, and Uvalde have become centers of pecan culture, and there are numerous cities with thousands of pecan trees. Abilene and San Angelo are like two big pecan orchards in the middle of Big Sky Country. Big cities such as San Antonio, Austin, Fort Worth, and Houston are very large pecan orchards with only one or two trees per home. There are hundreds of small towns, such as Clyde, Hamilton, Kerrville, Granbury, Vernon, and Palestine, which have over 1,000 pecan trees in yards, parks, and roadside areas. The state capitol in Austin, and many courthouse squares in places such as Mason, Menard, Eldorado, Fort Davis, Fort Stockton, and many more, are surrounded with beautiful pecan trees. Amarillo and Houston have used seedling pecans as city street trees with good success.

The 1999 Texas yard-tree crop is going to be one of the largest ever harvested. It is difficult to estimate the size of the crop, but an attempt is presented here. This is a very conservative estimate, as the production could be two or three times this amount. In contrast to the native groves along rivers and streams, all yard tree production will be harvested, regardless of market prices. Deep-freezes of families, relatives, and friends will be filled with this year's crop, for it may be many years before a crop this large will again be harvested from yard trees.

Yard trees on the deepest, well drained soil will always grow, bear, and look good. Shallow- or clay-soil yard trees need close attention to irrigation; some water should be applied every week from April to October, but not so much as to have run-off or soil saturated with water. Texas pecan yard trees need lots of space. It is far better to have one healthy tree in a yard than half a dozen which never receive enough water because of crowding. Shade is also a negative force in growing pecan trees. Trees so crowded that the lower limbs are touching, should have 50 percent of the trees removed. Pruning off lower limbs does not correct tree crowding problems.

Zinc foliar sprays and nitrogen fertilizer are needed every spring for good growth and healthy leaves. If water is applied every week from April to October, pecan trees will have healthy foliage until the first fall frost in November or December. Non-grafted seedling trees make the best yard trees, though their nuts will be small and they could take up to 10 years to bear. If a grafted tree is planted, it should be a small-nut variety such as Caddo for the areas of East Texas, the Gulf Coast, and the High Plains. Sioux should be planted in the drier climates of Central,

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South, and West Texas since it is less likely to suffer over-cropping stress in August and September when the trees' greatest water requirements occur.

Grass beneath pecan trees should be mowed very close throughout the growing season to insure maximum soil water for the pecans. Sidewalks, foundations, driveways, and other concrete soil covers should be as far away from pecan trees as possible, to insure good root growth and water absorption.

In Texas, there will be years such as 1999 when low-management pecan trees will produce as much as those that are well cared for. This is why all Texans love the pecan!

Texas Pecan Yard Tree Production For 1999

County	Locations	River	Trees	Acres	Pounds
Bexar	San Antonio	San Antonio	50,000	1,400	1,000,000
Bell	Temple, Belton, Killeen	Little River	30,000	850	600,000
Travis	Austin	Colorado	29,000	830	581,000
Taylor	Abilene		27,000	770	540,000
El Paso	Upper El Paso Valley	Rio Grande	20,000	571	399,000
Tom Green	San Angelo	Concho	15,000	430	301,000
McLennan	Waco	Brazos	10,000	285	200,000
Tarrant	Fort Worth	Trinity	10,000	285	200,000
Dallas	Dallas	Trinity	10,000	285	200,000
Harris	Houston	Buffalo Bayou	10,000	285	200,000
Fort Bend	Angleton, Richmond	Brazos	10,000	285	200,000
Brown	Brownwood	Pecan Bayou	7,000	200	150,000
Wichita	Wichita Falls	Wichita	5,000	142	100,000
Guadalupe	Seguin	Guadalupe	5,000	142	100,000
San Saba	San Saba	Colorado	5,000	142	100,000
Colorado	Columbus, Weimar	Colorado	5,000	142	100,000
Wharton	Wharton	Colorado	5,000	142	100,000
Uvalde	Uvalde	Leona	5,000	142	100,000
Lavaca	Hallettsville	Lavaca	5,000	142	100,000
Gonzales	Gonzales	Guadalupe	5,000	142	100,000
Jackson	Edna	Lavaca	2,500	71	50,000
DeWitt	Cureo	Guadalupe	2,500	71	50,000
Victoria	Victoria	Guadalupe	2,500	71	50,000
Bowie	Texarkana, New Boston	Red	2,500	71	50,000
Medina	Hondo, Casterville	Medina	2,000	57	40,000
Washington	Brenham		2,000	57	40,000
Galveston	LaMarque, Santa Fe		2,000	57	40,000
Lamar	Paris		2,000	57	40,000
All Others			50,000	1,400	1,000,000
Conservative Estimate, 1999 Texas Pecan Yard Crop			336,000	9,599	6,720,000

A special thanks is given to the County Extension Agents of Texas who helped estimate these figures. If anyone, reading these estimates or those of counties not listed, has figures which they feel better represent their number of trees large enough to bear 20 pounds of pecans, please mail them to the author at the address above.

Poinsettias

History of the Poinsettia

The History. Native to Mexico, the poinsettia originated in a region near the present-day city of Taxco. Joel Robert Poinsett, a Southern plantation owner and botanist, was appointed the first United States Ambassador to Mexico (1825-1829). While visiting Taxco, he was struck by the beauty of the brilliant red plants he found blooming in the region during December. He had some of the plants sent to his plantation in Greenville, South Carolina, where they flourished in his greenhouse. While the botanical name, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, was given by a German taxonomist in 1833, the common name, poinsettia, became and has remained the accepted name in English-speaking countries. With over 70 million plants sold nationwide each year, the poinsettia is now the number one flowering potted plant sold in the USA.

The Myth. The widespread belief that poinsettias are poisonous is a misconception. The safety of poinsettias in the home is demonstrated in scientific studies conducted by Ohio State University in cooperation with the Society of American Florists. The study concluded that no toxicity was evident at experimental ingestion levels far exceeding those likely to occur in a home environment. In fact, the POISINDEX Information Service, the primary information resource used by most poison control centers, states that a 50-pound child would have to ingest over 500 poinsettia bracts to surpass experimental doses. Yet even at this high level, no toxicity was demonstrated. As with all ornamental plants, the poinsettia is not intended for human or animal consumption.

How to Select a Beautiful Poinsettia

Bract Color. Look for plants with fully mature, thoroughly colored and expanded bracts, i.e., the colorful parts of the poinsettia. Avoid plants with too much green around the bract edges. Bracts



come in white, pink, peach, yellow, marbled or speckled, as well as the traditional red. An abundance of dark, rich green foliage is a vital sign of good plant health. Look for plants with dense, plentiful foliage all the way down the stem.

Shape and Proportion. Proper proportion of plant height and shape relative to container size is the key to an aesthetically pleasing poinsettia. Plants should appear balanced, full and attractive from all angles. A generally accepted standard is that the plant should be approximately 2-1/2 times taller than the diameter of the container.

Durability and Freshness. Select plants with stiff stems, good bract and leaf retention, and no signs of wilting, breaking, or drooping. Be wary of plants displayed in paper, plastic, or mesh sleeves. A poinsettia needs its space; the longer a plant remains sleeved, the more the plant quality will deteriorate. Examine the soil of the plant. It's best to avoid waterlogged soil, particularly if the plant appears wilted. This could be a sign of irreversible root rot. When transporting the plant, protect it from chilling winds and temperatures below 50 degrees F. Re-inserting the poinsettia into a sleeve or a large, roomy shopping bag will usually provide adequate protection for transporting the plant home when it is cold and windy.

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How to Care for Poinsettias at Home

Location and Temperature. The poinsettia thrives on indirect, natural daylight, and exposure to at least six hours daily is recommended. If direct sun cannot be avoided, diffuse with a light shade or sheer curtain. To prolong the bright color of the poinsettia bracts, daytime temperatures should not exceed 70 degrees F. Avoid placing the plants near drafts, excess heat, or the dry air from appliances, fireplaces, or ventilating ducts.

Water and Fertilizer. Poinsettias require moderately moist soil. Water the plants thoroughly when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. Remove the plant from decorative pots or covers, and water enough to completely saturate the soil. Do not allow the poinsettia to sit in any standing water; root rot could result which could kill the plant. It is not necessary to fertilize the poinsettia when it is in bloom.

Outside Placement. Since poinsettias are sensitive to cold weather, frost, and rain, outside placement during the winter months should be avoided. However, in mild climates, an enclosed patio or entry way may be suitable, provided the night temperatures do not drop below 55 degrees F. Make certain the delicate bracts are well protected from wind and cold rain.

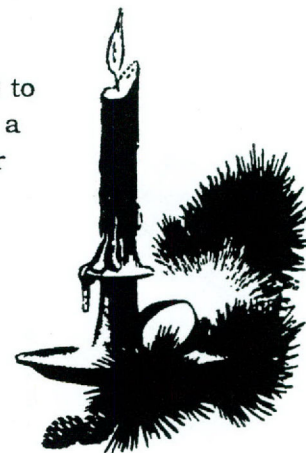
After the Holidays. Keep the plants in indirect sun and water regularly. Place your plants outdoors, where they can bask in the warmth of spring and summer, after outside night temperatures average 55 degrees F. or above. When the bracts age and lose their aesthetic appeal, usually by late March or early April, cut the poinsettia back to about 8 inches in height. By the end of May you should see vigorous new growth. Continue regular watering during the growth period. Fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks throughout the spring, summer, and fall months with a well-balanced, complete fertilizer. Around June 1, you may transplant your poinsettias into larger pots. Select pots no more than 4 inches larger than the original inner pot. A soil

mix with a considerable amount of organic matter, such as peat moss or leaf mold, is highly recommended. If you wish, you may transplant the poinsettias into a well-prepared garden bed. Be sure the planting bed is rich in organic matter and has good drainage. Pruning may be required during the summer to keep plants bushy and compact. Do not prune after September 1.

Re-flowering. The poinsettia is a photoperiodic plant, meaning that it sets bud and produces flowers as the autumn nights lengthen. The plants will naturally come into full bloom during November or December, depending upon the flowering response-time of the individual cultivar. Timing the bloom to coincide closely with the Christmas holiday can be difficult without the controlled environment of a greenhouse. Stray light of any kind, such as from outside street lights or household lamps, could delay or entirely halt the re-flowering process.

Starting October 1, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. Accomplish this by moving the plants to a totally dark room, or by covering them with a large box overnight. During October, November, and early December, the plants require 6 to 8 hours of bright sunlight daily, with nighttime temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F. Temperatures outside this range may delay flowering. Continue the normal watering and fertilizer program.

Following this regime for 8 to 10 weeks should result in a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season.



Transplanting Native Plants

By Dwight S. Hall, Extension Horticulturist (Retired), Overton, Texas

Many desirable native or wild Texas plants are adaptable for the home landscape. The natives are hardy to local weather conditions, local soils, and perhaps more tolerant of local garden insects and diseases. Most natives are easy to grow, yet the task of successfully transplanting the desired native from the wild is often difficult, and must be done with care.



Have leaf mold and loam on hand to fill in or work around the new plant's root system.

In choosing the native plant to transplant, do not attempt to transplant an overly large specimen. Small plants are usually more vigorous. They grow much faster and are easier to handle. It may be necessary to tag the plant in the wild while in leaf or berry to be sure of

The wet, cold days of winter are ideal times for transplanting plants, both native or cultivated species. Due to cold, the plants are dormant or in a state of rest, and will not suffer the shock of moving and the interruption of growth.

a positive identification. Young elms, void of foliage, often resemble native redbuds. Not all hollies will produce berries; in selecting yaupon, deciduous holly, and American holly, choose the female plants with berries.

Special precautions must be taken when selecting native plants for transplanting. Even though these plants are hardy, it is often difficult for the home owner to substitute the natural or native woodland environment which nature has provided. The gardener must first ask if he or she can provide growing conditions similar to those in which the plant now thrives. If not, leave the plant to nature.

Particularly in the case of large specimens, it may be well to prune the root system of the selected native prior to digging. Prune the plant's lateral roots at least one growing season prior to complete transplanting. Making spade cuts around the plant helps it to adjust to shock prior to transplanting and develop a more intensive root system.

Before digging, the home owner must decide which native plants will best fit his or her landscape needs. It would be unwise to select a native dogwood for a sunny location, since dogwood demands shade or overhead protection. The planting area for the new plant should be well prepared prior to transplanting. Dig the planting hole both wider and deeper than the native plant's root system. Add woods loam, peat or humus, or, preferably, the type of soil from which the native is taken.

When transplanting, lift the plant with a ball of earth if possible. Wrap the ball with a moist burlap sack or similar material for easy transferal and to prevent disturbance of the root system. Plant the native plant at its normal growth depth immediately after digging. Water well after planting, and mulch over the root areas with leaves, straw, or leaf mold.

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It's a Great Time to Have Your Soil Tested

By Sam Cotner, Head, Department of Horticultural Sciences

If your garden performed below expectations last year, or maybe things just didn't grow quite right, a few dollars invested in a soil test may be just the solution. A properly prepared and fertilized garden soil is the real key to successful gardening in most areas of Texas. You can't look at the soil, taste it, smell it, or feel it to tell whether your soil is low in nitrogen, high in phosphates, or maybe just right. One sure way to overcome the mystery, and avoid confusion when it comes time to purchase fertilizers, is to have your garden soil tested.

Why is it important to know how much phosphorus or nitrogen is in the soil, or what the pH of the soil is? The answer is simple. Vegetables don't do well in improperly fertilized soil, whether it be too fertile or not fertile enough.

The soil test report will tell you the level of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium available to your garden plants. It will also indicate the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of your garden soil. For the most part, this is all you need to know to properly fertilize your garden soil, and insure a bountiful harvest.



To take a soil sample, make a hole about a foot deep in the garden with a spade or sharpshooter. Throw out the first spadefull of soil. Then, from the back of the hole, cut a slice of the soil 1/2 inch to 1 inch thick. Be sure the slice is at least 6 to 7 inches in depth, with fairly even width and thickness. Then place the soil slice in a bucket or tub. Repeat this procedure 4 to 6 times in different spots in the garden, depending primarily on the size of the garden. Thoroughly mix the composite of the soil, and mail it to the Soils Testing Laboratory here at Texas A&M University. Soil testing is a service provided by the University; soil test kits, with instructions, can also be obtained from your local county Extension agent.

If a soil sample is taken in late winter or very early spring, you should expect to get your results back within 2 to 3 weeks. If you wait until spring, then it may take considerably longer to get your results back. An adequate soil test, properly done and properly interpreted, will go a long way toward insuring a bountiful harvest from this spring's garden.

Transplanting Native Plants (Continued from Page 10)

Pruning transplanted plants is often difficult for the gardener, but usually is essential for viability. Cut back the upper branches and end shoots of limbs to compensate for loss of root area and to encourage new branching and foliage growth come spring. Some of the foliage should be stripped or removed from evergreen plants.

Some of the most desirable and abundant native plants that may be transplanted now include: Dogwood, Redbud, River Birch, Sassafras, Cherry, Laurel, Native Oaks, Elms, and Maples

Regardless of your choice, be sure you transplant with caution and care; otherwise, leave it to nature.

A Child's Garden of Earthly Delights

Twenty-five Gardening Ideas for Kids

Getting kids into the summer garden is a breeze, but how can you sustain the habit when chilly temperatures force you indoors? With these ideas from the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN), you'll find that fall and winter offer an abundance of gardening opportunities.

1. *Windowsill Gardens*

When snowdrifts keep kids inside, try cultivating a windowsill garden. All you need is a sunny spot and a few containers of dirt. Herbs are an excellent choice for windowsills.

2. *Peculiar Plants*

What kid could resist the fascination of an insect-eating plant? Many garden centers sell Venus Flytraps in their houseplant section.

3. *Calendar Countdown*

Mark your calendar with gardening reminders: start seedlings indoors; prepare soil; plant garden; etc. Then, start counting down the days.

4. *Pick a Theme*

Fall is a great time to plan a theme garden. Try an insect-named garden with butterfly bush and bee balm. An international garden could include French lavender and Greek oregano. The possibilities are endless, but always select themes that will prosper in your growing zone.

5. *Pizza Plots*

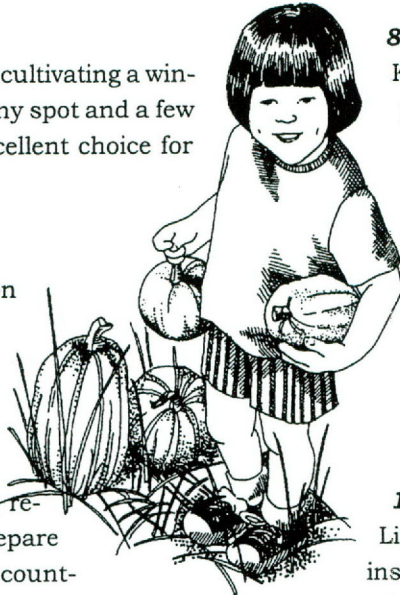
Plant a pizza? Why not? Section your plot into wedges of tomatoes, oregano, basil, and peppers. Temperate climates allow this activity year-round; barring that, whet appetites by planning ahead for spring.

6. *Hidden Treasure*

For young children, digging up carrots, potatoes, or radishes is like searching for buried treasure.

7. *Scarecrows*

What would autumn be without one? Search the attic for old clothes, and stuff them with hay or pine straw. Then post your creation in the garden.



8. *Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum*

Kids are impressed with giant versions of pumpkins, gourds, and squash. Next time you're at the garden center, look for novelty varieties created especially for kids.

9. *Marigold leis*

What could be easier to grow than this hardy annual? In some areas, these sunny flowers bloom into fall. Pick blossoms and string along a heavy thread for a colorful lei.

10. *Watch Seeds Sprout*

Line a glass jar with a damp paper towel and insert several zucchini seeds between glass and towel. Place a lid on the jar, leave it on the kitchen counter, and check the paper every day to make sure it's moist. In a few days, those sleeping seeds will burst into life.

11. *Kids' Gardening Clubs*

If you haven't visited your garden center lately, you'll be pleasantly surprised to discover the trend toward kid-friendly shopping experiences. Many centers host kids' clubs that are as educational as they are fun.

12. *Spark Interest with Books*

Titles like *Peter Rabbit* and *The Secret Garden* will have kids dreaming of spring gardens all winter long. Ask your librarian or book seller for additional titles.



(Continued on Page 13)



13. Water Gardens

Yes, even kids are getting into this trend. With adult supervision, older children can create a simple water garden from a plastic wading pool. Ask your nursery professional for ideas. Add goldfish for even more fun.

14. A Space of Their Own

Give older kids their own plot -- a 3 by 4 foot space will do. Let them research what they want to plant and allow them to carry through with the plan. Supervision is advised, but stay in the background as much as possible.

15. Jack and the Beanstalk

Rumor has it that hyacinth beanstalks, with their large leaves and speedy growth, are the beanstalk of legend. In any case, children love the heights to which this bean aspires.

16. Homegrown Holidays

With advance planning, your family can glean gifts from the garden. Dried herbs, tied with decorative ribbons, or cleverly packaged flower seeds collected from your own flowers, are two possibilities.

17. Decorate While You Wait

Let kids indulge their natural creativity by painting inexpensive terra cotta pots to use next spring or for holiday gifts. Craft stores can direct you to safe yet durable paint selections.



18. Get a Jump Start on Spring

Start seeds indoors to plant after the last frost. Nurseries or Cooperative Extension Services can tell you when it's safe to plant your seedlings.

19. Worm Farm

Line a large cardboard box with a garbage bag. Fill it with soil, organic matter, and a few worms. Keep it shady and moist but not wet. Worms are a fun way for kids to understand the interdependence of plants and organisms. Your wiggly wonders will aerate soil and turn kitchen scraps into valuable compost.

20. Garden Whimsy

Keep a sense of humor by letting children craft garden ornaments. Homemade whirligigs between plant rows and hand-painted plant markers are two examples.

21. Leaf Detectives

Stroll through your neighborhood collecting colorful leaves. Try to identify them with the help of a tree guide, then press and save them in a scrapbook.

22. Terrariums

Carefully place some soil and a few plants (with roots) inside a clean mayonnaise jar. Keep your indoor garden moist with a plant mister and cover the opening with clear plastic wrap.

23. Avian Diner

Stock up on bird seed and suet from your garden center and feed the birds. You'll be rewarded with song and color while aiding the birds' winter survival.

24. Pot People

Draw or paint faces on pots, and plant grass seed in the pots for hair.

25. Build a Birdhouse

Birdhouse kits and plans are easily found. This is a great activity for a cold winter's night.



This article appeared in the American Association of Nurserymen's newsletter "Discover the Pleasure of Gardening," 1996-1997.

Live Christmas Trees

By Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist

The boughs of holly have been used to deck the halls, and sprigs of mistletoe hang over every door, but the one plant that Christmas would not be complete without has yet to be brought in -- the Christmas tree. The kids are anxious; they want to decorate the tree NOW! But this year, for something new and longer-lasting, a living tree was what you wanted. Now what?

The first thing to do is pick out a tree. Consider the following: Aleppo Pine, Japanese Black Pine, Japanese Yew, Loblolly Pine, Deodar Cedar, Juniper, or other coniferous evergreens. Perhaps you prefer a broad-leaved tree; possibilities include: American Holly, Burford Holly, Compact Cherry Laurel, or Yaupon. Or you might decide on a tubbed plant to remain inside after the Christmas season? The Norfolk Island Pine, kumquats, calamondins, or Yews would be good choices.

Once the tree is chosen (if it isn't tubbed), a container must be chosen as well. If the tree roots are balled and burlapped, a container must be used that will allow at least an inch of peat moss, potting soil, or compost around the ball to prevent drying out. If the plant has been grown in a container, it can be made much more attractive by placing it in a redwood tub, ceramic or clay pot, or even a wooden box lined with a polyethylene film liner. All containers should be well drained to prevent damage to the roots caused by excess moisture. A pan underneath the container will also prevent floor damage.

Now that the tree is in the container and in the house, you can start to give the kids a little leeway. All you have to do now is find a good place for the tree that is not in the stream of heat or near a stove or radiator. When not occupied, the room should be kept as cool as possible, and the plant should be watered when dry. A simple way to tell when the plant needs water is to push a sharpened pencil into the soil. If the pencil comes out dry and clean, the



plant needs water; otherwise, wait until the next day.

After Christmas, it is best to plant the tree in the landscape as soon as possible. The selected site for the tree should fit into the landscape design, and allow sufficient room for growth and development. The pit dug for the tree should be large enough to allow three to four inches of soil on all sides of the soil ball. It should be planted at the same depth it was planted at the nursery or in the container. For the backfill, add one part peat moss, pine bark, or compost to two parts soil, and pack this mixture firmly around the ball. When the pit is three-fourths full, the tree should be watered thoroughly, and then filled the rest of the way. If the plant was balled and burlapped, the burlap should be loosened before completely filling the hole.

The tree is now a permanent part of your landscape. To keep it healthy while it is adapting to its new environment, here are some tips:

- Water it regularly, but allow the soil to dry a little between waterings.
- Mulch the surface with some kind of organic matter, to reduce weeds and conserve moisture.
- Avoid fertilization until June or July following planting.
- Keep weeds and grass down, to prevent competition.

The tree can be used to serve another purpose -- the beautification of your yard. Planted into your landscape, these trees can add a nice touch in the spring, summer, and fall, and can even serve as an outdoor Christmas tree next time Christmas rolls around.

Garden Checklist for November and December

By Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist

- ✓ Place orders for seeds now so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.
- ✓ Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- ✓ Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well lighted window.
- ✓ Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- ✓ Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- ✓ November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. In the Panhandle, planting is often delayed until February or early March.
- ✓ In all but North Texas and the Panhandle, continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus.
- ✓ Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- ✓ Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- ✓ Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.
- ✓ Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.
- ✓ Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't over water. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- ✓ Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant.
- ✓ Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time in December if they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- ✓ Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.
- ✓ Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half, to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.
- ✓ Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.
- ✓ Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.

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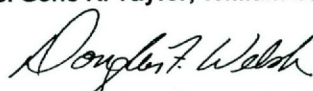
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Douglas F. Welsh, Editor November/December 1999