

Green Garden News

Save Your Poinsettia for Use Next Christmas

When the holidays are over and you pack away the decorations, don't pitch the poinsettia plant. If you're up for a challenge, this year's poinsettia could become a part of your holiday decorations next year.

Ron Oetting has several poinsettia plants in his greenhouse left over from past holidays. Oetting is a research entomologist with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Each year he is surrounded by a new crop of poinsettias he studies to solve insect problems growers face each year.

Saving can be a challenge. "I have new plants each year for research. But I also have a group of plants that I save from year to year," Oetting said. "You can save them from year to year at home, too. But it's a challenge. You just have to understand how a poinsettia works."

Once the Christmas presents have all been opened and holiday decorations are packed away, treat your poinsettia like any other houseplant. "You don't want to overwater or underwater a poinsettia plant," Oetting said.

During the spring and summer, a poinsettia is a green foliage plant. "When the weather turns warm, repot your poinsettia," he said. "You also need to decide whether you want

your plant to be a bush or a tree."

If you fancy trees, he said, cut off all the plant's side shoots and leave a single runner that will grow upward. If a bush is more to your liking, pinch off the terminal shoot and the side shoots to make the plant branch more.

"Where you keep your poinsettia between New Year's and September doesn't make a whole lot of difference, as long as it gets light," Oetting said. "The tricky part comes after September.

"To flower, the plant needs the same amount of darkness Mother Nature provides," he said.

"Somehow, you've got to keep that plant in the dark after the sun goes down, and it has to stay in the dark until the sun comes up. If there is any flash of light, you can forget it."

Once the plant begins turning the bright red it's known for, there's no turning back. "Once it starts turning, it's gonna go," Oetting said. "It's already set physiologically."

Oetting has seen this process work and fail. "We saved some poinsettias in one greenhouse from the previous year and they were right on track," he said. "But the poinsettias in the greenhouse next door were doing poorly. We figured out why when we noticed the streetlight just outside the

(Continued on page 6)

Volume 3, Issue 1

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Inside this issue:

January Tips	2
New UF/IFAS Publications	2
Recycle Your Christmas Tree	3
Upcoming Events	3
Garden Tool Maintenance	4
Questions & Answers	5

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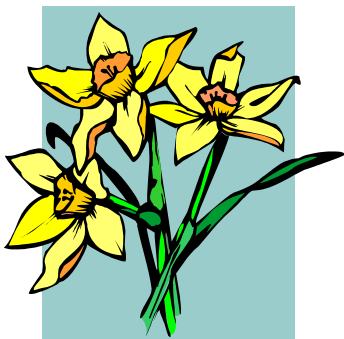
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January Tips

Flowers

- Refrigerated bulbs such as tulip, daffodil and hyacinth should be planted in prepared beds.
- Start seeds of warm season flowers late this month in order to have transplants in March.
- There's still time to transplant some cool season annuals such as carnations, foxglove, pansies, petunias and snapdragons.
- Re-fertilize cool season flowerbeds, using a liquid or dry form of fertilizer. Be careful not to apply excessive amounts and keep granules away from the base of stems.
- Finish dividing crowded perennials. Don't wait until spring for this job.
- Plant bare root roses immediately after they are purchased.



Trees and Shrubs

- Plant trees and shrubs. This is an ideal time of year for transplanting larger specimens.
- Plant bare root plants such as deciduous ornamental shrubs and trees.
- Prune dormant shade trees, if needed
- Stick hardwood cuttings of fig, grape, honeysuckle, althea, catalpa, forsythia and wisteria.

Fruits and Nuts

- Apply dormant oil spray to peach, plum, nectarine and other deciduous fruit trees. This practice is necessary when growing the stone fruits in locations along the Gulf Coast. **Note:** This applies to the flowering peaches and cherries since they are susceptible to the same pests as their fruiting cousins.
- Plant bare root deciduous fruit trees.
- Prune dormant fruit trees if needed.

Vegetable Garden

- Start seeds of warm season vegetables late this month in order to have transplants in March.
- Lime (if needed), and begin preparing vegetable gardens for the spring planting.
- Cool season vegetables that can still be planted in the garden are: beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, Irish potatoes, radishes and turnips.
- Irish potatoes can be started from January through March by planting seed pieces 3 to 4 inches deep in rows. Always purchase certified seed potatoes.

Lawns

- Check soil moisture during winter and water as needed.

New UF/IFAS Publications

Bats of Florida is now available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW203>.

A Series on Diseases in the Florida Vegetable Garden: Tomato is now available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PP121>.

A Series on Diseases in the Florida Vegetable Garden: Peppers is now available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PP122>.

Fire in the Wildland-Urban Interface: Preparing a Firewise Plant List is now available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/FR/FR15100.pdf>.

The Pecan Tree is now available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS229>

Not online?
Contact your
local Extension
Office
for a copy.

Recycle Your Christmas Trees

In Escambia County

These drop-off and curbside services are for Escambia County residents only.

Please be sure to remove all decorations and ornaments as well as any attached tree stands prior to drop off.

Emerald Coast Utilities Authority

ECUA Customers can place Christmas trees at the curb on their normal yard trash collection days from December 27th through January 10th. Trees taller than six (6) feet should be cut in two pieces for collection.

In addition ECUA has designated the following three locations as drop-off sites:

- Sanitation Complex at 3050 Godwin Lane (just east of Pine Forest Rd)
- Blue Angel Parkway (1/2 mile north of Lillian Hwy)
- Ellyson Park

City of Pensacola

The City of Pensacola has designated three (3) conveniently located places where trees may be dropped off at any time through January 31, 2005:

- The vacant area adjacent to the Fire Station on Summit Boulevard
- On Maxwell Street under Interstate 110
- Bill Gregory Park on North "W" Street near Navy Boulevard (behind the softball field)

These sites are for customers of Sanitation Services of Pensacola only. For more information, please call 435-1890.

The Department of Solid Waste Management is also accepting Christmas trees *free of charge* through January 31, 2005 at the Perdido Landfill.

In Santa Rosa County

In addition to recycling plastics and paper, Santa Rosa residents have an opportunity to recycle their Christmas Trees. The Recycle Department has made arrangements for all trees dropped off at one of five locations below to be chipped and made available to county residents as clean mulch. In this way, your tree will continue to be useful to many families throughout the county.

The drop off locations are:

- Gulf Power Engineering Office at Oriole Beach, north side of Hwy 98
- Navarre Recreation Center on High School Road
- Gulf Power Site along East Spencer Road
- Clean Community System at 405 Park Avenue
- Jay Transfer Station, approximately 5 miles south of Jay

Mulch will be available starting in January at two locations within the county, the south end County Service Center along Hwy 98 and the Clean Community System in Milton. For additional information please call the county's Environmental Department at 981-7135.

Upcoming Events

The UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension Service and the Santa Rosa Master Gardeners are pleased to announce they will present their award winning **Gulf Coast Gardening from the Ground UP!** Program at both the Milton and Navarre Libraries in 2005. They will be presenting one program each month, from January through October. The programs will be presented on the third Thursday of each month at the Milton Library at 5541 Alabama Street at 6:30PM. Registration for the class will open at 6:00PM each day of the class. The same program will be presented at the Navarre Library at 8484 James M Harvell Road on the third Saturday of the month at 10:00AM. Registration will open at 9:00AM each day of the class. Please note that the third Thursday and

Saturday do not always occur in the same week of each month. The schedule for the first four months of the program follows:

January - "**Pruning Woody Plants**" by Frank Larson, Santa Rosa County Master Gardener
February - "**Tree Selection and Planting**" by Theresa Friday, Santa Rosa County Residential Horticultural Agent
March - "**Spring Vegetable Gardening**" by Jim Tolar, Santa Rosa County Master Gardener
April - "**Lawns**" by Theresa Friday

Each class is expected to last approximately two and one half hours, including a short break. Each class will be followed by a thirty minute question and answer period, as needed.

Garden Tool Maintenance

Winter finally arrived and the area has received several frosts and freezes. Freezes send our warm-season grasses like centipede and St. Augustine into dormancy. So now it's time to think about putting up the mower and taking a well-deserved break from cutting the grass. But, before you completely put that lawn mower out of your mind, think about performing some preventative maintenance. Following are a few easy steps that will have your mower ready to go when the grass starts growing next spring.

- Fuel only has a shelf life of about 30 days before it begins to break down. If near the end of a tank of gasoline, run the mower till it stalls. If you have a full tank add some gasoline stabilizer and run the mower for a couple of minutes to distribute it throughout the engine.
- Drain and replace the engine oil since dirt and other contaminants can settle and build up on the engine.
- Remove the spark plug. Add a teaspoon of oil to the hole and replace the plug (but don't connect the wire). Crank or turn the engine by giving the cord a couple of pulls to distribute the oil. This will protect the engine from corrosion.
- Clean the air filter. Foam air filters should be cleaned with warm soapy water or other appropriate solvent. Before replacing the filter, pour a couple tablespoons of clean engine oil on the filter and squeeze to distribute. Paper filters can be shaken or blown clean or just replaced with a new one.
- Tighten fasteners and screws, bolts and nuts as needed.
- Give the entire mower a good cleaning. Clean off all debris and remove grass clippings from the engine area and the underside.
- If you have a battery, remove and clean.



Charge if necessary and store in a cool, dry place where it won't freeze.

- If your mower is scratched or roughed up, paint these areas to prevent rust and corrosion.
- Lubricate as necessary per the operator's manual.
- Store the mower in a dry place or cover the unit to protect it from the elements. Note: Never store the mower in the house (living area) or basement where ignition sources may be present such as hot water and space heaters, clothes dryers and the like because gasoline and fumes are highly flammable, explosive and dangerous if inhaled.

And let's not forget our other tools. Following are some help preventative maintenance tips to prepare our tools and other materials for that first warm day next spring.

- Scrub your shovels, rakes and trowels with soap and water, dry thoroughly and apply a thin coat of oil. Cleaned tools should be hung on a rack built for this purpose.
- All unused garden hoses should be drained prior to storage. Remove and replace hose washers.
- Thoroughly rinse the fertilizer spreader and oil all moving parts.
- Leftover chemicals can be dangerous. Be sure they are stored in an area that is warm enough to prevent freezing.

These chores done, you can relax, knowing that you are ready for next spring.

—by Theresa Friday, Residential Horticulture Faculty, UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension

Questions and Answers

Q: What is the difference between a daffodil and a narcissus?

A: The simple answer is: none. Narcissus is the Latin or botanical name for all daffodils, just as *Ilex* is for hollies. Daffodil is the common name for all members of the genus *Narcissus*, and its use is recommended by the American Daffodil Society at all times other than in scientific writing.

Q. What is a jonquil?

A: In the southeastern U.S., all yellow daffodils have traditionally been referred to as jonquils. However, according to the official book of daffodils, the International Registry and Daffodil List, maintained by Great Britain's Royal Horticultural Society, only certain daffs can truly be called jonquils. These have several yellow flowers, strong fragrance, and rounded foliage, as defined under Division 7 and Division 10 in the official registry. However, here in the South, should a gardener ask to show you their jonquils, it is recommended that you allow good manners to triumph over your scholarliness.

Q: My sago palms have suffered from cold injury this winter. Should I start removing the dead fronds, or wait until spring?

A: Hold off on pruning until late winter or early spring. At that time remove any fronds that are totally brown, but leave those that have green on half or more of their surface area. This allows some photosynthesis to continue while the plants are recovering. The older, damaged fronds can be gradually removed next season.

Q: My hibiscus and several other perennials froze during the last cold snap. They look terrible. Can I cut them back now?

A: There is a tendency to want to repair cold damaged plants by pruning them. Eventually some pruning will be required, but delay any major pruning of plants even though they might already be showing signs of cold injury.

There are a couple of reasons for storing the pruners for awhile. First, this soon after a freeze, it is impossible to know the exact extent of the dam-

age. Although tender, succulent plants like tropics and subtropics begin showing damage within a few hours or days of a hard freeze, the more woody shrubs often don't show the extent of injury for several weeks. The larger more woody the stems, the more time it takes for damaged wood to show signs.

Pruning that is done too soon almost guarantees that cuts will be made at the wrong place on stems. If cuts are made above the point where branches were killed they will require pruning again later in the season. On the other hand, if pruned excessively, too much live stem tissue is removed, resulting in weakened plants.

A second, and equally important reason for avoiding heavy pruning now, is because pruning stimulates new shoot growth. Typically, on a stem just below a fresh cut, several buds begin to grow during the first warm period. And, as gardeners, stimulated shrub growth is exactly what we don't want during mid-winter.

Most pruning jobs to remove cold damaged branches can wait for several weeks. Late winter, around the last part of February, is normally a good time for this kind of pruning.

Q: I have several ruts in my yard from equipment that removed trees and other debris after the hurricane. Can I level those spots out this time of year?

A: April is probably the best month for applying soil topdressing or filling and leveling yards, especially if there is lawn grass present.

Winter is not the best time because most grass is dormant now. Since the turf is not growing at this time of year, any that is covered with soil could either smother from lack of enough oxygen or be attacked by rot fungi.

Grass covered with a shallow layer of soil during spring, on the other hand, will be actively growing and will recover more quickly by growing up through the new soil. There is a limit, by the way, as to how much soil can be safely spread over lawn grass without killing it. If more than two to three inches of fill is needed to level low spots, the sod should be lifted and replaced after the appropriate amount of soil has been applied.

Poinsettia Next Christmas

(Continued from page 1)
greenhouse door."

Oetting doesn't recommend trying to save your poinsettia plant unless you are up for a challenge and don't mind failure. "It's too easy to break the period of darkness," he said. "It's also a whole lot easier and cheaper to buy a new one each fall."

One unique characteristic of poinsettias is that its red "flowers" aren't actually flowers at all. The true flower of the plant is the small yellow flower in the center of the red color. The spectacular red, flower-like arrangements are the plant's bracts or leaves.

A tropical plant from Central America, the poinsettia is also known as the Christmas Star or the Mexican Flameleaf. It's named for its discoverer, J.R. Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

—By Sharon Omahen, University of Georgia



Santa Rosa County Extension Service

6263 Dogwood Drive
Milton, FL. 32570-3500

Newsletter compiled by:

Theresa Friday

Extension Agent I

Environmental Horticulture

Phone: 850-623-3868 or 934-5278

E-mail: theresaf@co.santa-rosa.fl.us

Website: http://www.co.santa-rosa.fl.us/santa_rosa/extension/index.html

SANTA ROSA COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE
6263 DOGWOOD DRIVE
MILTON, FL 32570-3500

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