



# THE GARDEN SPADE



A monthly Gardening Publication of the University of Missouri Extension -- Southeast and East Central Regions

## Holiday Cactus

by Donna Aufdenberg

One of the prettiest blooms you will find on a houseplant is that of the Christmas or Holiday cactus. The cacti flowers come in various shades of red, pink and white, offering multiple shapes and sizes to provide a brilliant addition to your holiday decorations.



There has been a little bit of confusion with the naming of Holiday cacti. The Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) is commonly confused with the Thanksgiving cacti (*Schlumbergera truncata*), so the term 'Holiday cactus' is often used to describe both plants.

Although the two plants are closely related, there are subtle differences that distinguish them from each other. First, the Christmas cactus typically blooms in mid-December, while the Thanksgiving cactus typically blooms in mid-November. So if your Christmas cactus always blooms in November, then you probably actually have a Thanksgiving cactus. Secondly, the Christmas cactus has smooth, rounded leaf margins, while the Thanksgiving cactus has pointed leaf margins or "claws".

Holiday cacti need plenty of organic matter and a well-drained, porous soil.

You can create the optimum soil by combining one part potting soil with two parts peat and one part coarse sand or Perlite. The plants also prefer a slightly acid pH.

As far as watering goes, Holiday cacti are much more tolerant of dry soils than of wet ones. However, despite being succulents, they don't really tolerate drought conditions all that well. As with most plants, the best way to determine if the cacti need water is to feel the soil. You can let the top couple of inches of soil dry out, but once the top half of soil is dry, then it is probably time to water again. If you have the light, loamy soil mixture as described before, the soil will drain pretty readily so the plant isn't setting in water. After watering, discard any water that has accumulated in the saucer below the pot so that the soil won't remain saturated. A good rule of thumb about watering is "when in doubt, don't water."

Two things will trigger the holiday cacti to produce flower buds: either short days and/or low temperatures. Day lengths of 12 hours or less and temperatures of 59 to 68 degrees are optimal for flowering. Usually three to four weeks of these conditions is enough to trigger flowering. The

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## Holiday Cactus

by Donna Aufdenberg

plants will flower regardless of day length if kept at temperatures between 55 to 59 degrees. They will also flower regardless of temperature if given 12 hours or less of daylight for three to four weeks.

After blooming, pinch or cut off a few sections of the branches to promote new growth and branching. You can propagate the plants in this manner as well as by cutting the last two to three sections off of the branches.

There are very few insect and disease problems

associated with Holiday cacti. Most diseases are caused by heavy, wet soils. Scale insects and mealybugs can be a problem, but are easy to control by scraping or wiping with alcohol using a cotton swab.

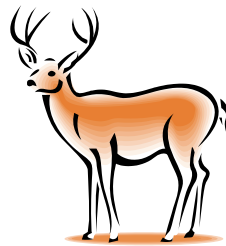
Christmas cacti can survive and provide beautiful blooms for many years. In fact, they are often handed down or inherited between family and friends. A little extra care will go a long way in ensuring your cactus provides brilliant flowers each holiday season.

## Limiting Deer Damage on Plants

by Katie Kammler

If you grow plants, most likely you have experienced problems with deer damage. Deer feed selectively on plants in landscapes and gardens. This is called browsing and is recognized by torn leaves or stalks with ragged ends. Deer have no upper incisors and must jerk or tear plants off to feed. Rabbits and other small rodents have both top and bottom teeth and usually leave cleanly cut plant stalks. Antler rubbing is another form of damage that occurs when bucks rub their antlers on trees. The damage is characterized by vertical scrapes and shredded bark on the saplings, exposing underlying wood.

Plant palatability, previous habits, nutritional needs, seasonal factors, weather conditions, and availability of alternative foods are some factors that determine whether deer will target a particular plant species or variety. They are creatures of habit, following previous patterns of foraging, often going after the same plants year after year. Since deer follow the same patterns, one plant species may be rarely damaged in one area but highly preferred in another due to differences in deer pressure and other factors.



The most severe damage from deer browsing occurs when snow cover or extreme cold has reduced the availability of food. Early spring is another problem time when fresh new lush growth of ornamental plants provides attractive browse before other spring growth is available. Also in a year where food is in scarce supply, deer will browse on even the most undesirable plants. Deer damage can be managed by careful plant selections, repellents, physical barriers (fencing), and population control.

Repellants work by making plant material unattractive to deer so they feed elsewhere. Repellants may not be effective if no alternative food source is available or if the deer pressure is too high. Fencing is the most effective way to exclude deer from valuable crops but is also the most expensive option. A woven wire fence needs to be 8-foot tall to stop deer. Electric fences can also be effective.

For more information on lists of plants resistant to deer damage, fence designs, and repellants, refer to MU Guide Controlling Deer Damage in Missouri. <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/MP685>

# November Gardening Calendar

By Donna Aufdenberg

## Ornamentals

- Prevent frost cracking or sunscald by wrapping trunks with commercial tree wrap or painting the south and southwest facing sides of the trunk with white latex outdoor paint. Young, thin barked trees such as maples and many fruit trees are especially susceptible.
- Take a walk through your garden as the fall season winds down. Take time to reflect on the successes and failures of your gardens this year. Make notes in your gardening notebook for new things to try, and things to fix, next spring.
- Mulch used in spring and summer to control weed growth is different from the mulch used in winter. Winter mulch to protect perennial plants should not be dense and heavy. Put down shredded tree branches, pine boughs, or small leaves when the ground freezes in your region. In spring, rake away the mulch material and add it to the compost pile.
- Check guy wires around newly planted trees to be sure hose sections still cover the supporting wires or ropes so they will not damage the trunks in windy weather.
- Inspect trees and shrubs for bagworm capsules and the silvery egg masses of tent caterpillars. Remove and destroy them to reduce next year's pest population.



## Vegetables

- Have garden soil tested for fertilizer needs every three to five years.
- Fall tilling, except in erosion-prone areas, helps improve soil structure and usually leads to soils warming up and drying faster in the spring, thus allowing crops to be planted earlier.
- Rhubarb plants that are 4 years old can be divided and transplanted. A site prepared by deep digging and incorporating compost will pay off with a good yield in upcoming years.
- To prevent insects or diseases from over-wintering in the garden, remove and compost all plant debris.

## Fruits

- Break the crust on the surface of any sawdust mulch you have around blueberries, shrubs, and perennials to improve the absorption of water from fall rains.
- Keep mulches pulled back several inches from the base of fruit trees to prevent bark injury from hungry mice and other rodents.
- Fallen, spoiled or mummified fruit should be cleaned up from the garden and destroyed by burying.
- Mulch strawberries for winter with straw. This should be done after several nights near 20 degrees, but before the temperatures drop into the teens. Apply straw loosely, but thick enough to hide plants from view.

## Tips For Keeping Holiday Greenery Fresh

Use clean, sharp cutters to cut branches.

Immediately place the cut end into water until ready to use.

Crush ends of woody stems to allow more water uptake.

Immerse greenery in water overnight before arranging.

Allow foliage to dry and then use anti-transpirant to help seal in moisture.

Keep completed wreaths, garlands and arrangements in a cool location until use.

Use new plants to replace greenery and fruits throughout the holiday season if they become less than fresh.



## Plant of Merit—*Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Limelight’ Panicle hydrangea

by Sarah Denkler

This woody hydrangea can grow up to 10 feet tall by 8 feet wide. This is a good choice for low-water use areas. The 12 inch cone shaped, lime-green flowers begin in mid summer and remain showy through fall turning pink at the tip. Cut back the previous seasons growth, leaving a few buds, in winter or early spring to obtain larger flower heads. Grows in zones 4-8. Cuttings can be made in May to July. The plant can be pruned into a tree form.

**This plant is hard to kill once established.**

Picture courtesy of Garden Heights Nursery, Richmond Heights, MO



## Theme Gardens

by Sarah Denkler

I have often said when teaching landscape design, “To tie your landscape together, a theme may be the easiest place to start.” Theme gardens can help to coordinate a design by providing guidelines that narrow the pallet and organize ideas.

Themes that are often used are color themes, types of landscapes, or a favorite vacation spot.

Color could be a garden with only white flowers or maybe one that is red, white and blue. Everything used in the garden is selected to meet the chosen theme limitation. Plant and material selection must conform to that guideline for year long interest.

Common themes or landscape styles include country gardens, Japanese gardens, cottage gardens, heritage gardens, 5 senses gardens or perhaps a children's garden.

Creating the feel of your favorite vacation spot is done by using plants that are from that area of the world or by using plants that resemble the species from those areas. If a favorite location on the globe is in the tropics then use annuals from that area or

search for plants that mimic tropical plants. Instead of palm trees try ferns or large leaved plants. Flowers are abundant in the tropics so work to provide bloom for as much of the year as possible.

In each case, design around how the space will be used and create areas with walls (shrubs and perennials), ceilings (trees or arbors) and a floor (grass or rock). Select plants based on the chosen theme but continue to work for year long interest and use plants that inspire and relax.



Artist depicts a traditional cottage garden - minimal and small with food, animals and essentials for survival.

# Keeping Plants Healthy Indoors

by Donna Aufdenberg

Houseplants can help add comfort to our homes by adding a bit of life and greenery. The late fall and winter environment can be hard on them, so proper care during these next several months is a must.

Light is essential for plant growth. Light levels in fall and winter are only a fraction of what they are in summer. The distance a plant is from a light source and the direction a window is facing is important. Northern exposures have the least intensity, whereas, southern exposures have the most. Southern and Western exposures tend to have direct light, whereas, Eastern and Northern exposures will have indirect. Other factors that can limit light are curtains or blinds over windows, shading from trees or buildings, clouds, and cleanliness of the windows.

Plants are divided into 3 categories: low light, medium light and high light. Low light plants like Peace Lily, Philodendron, and English ivy prefer north or east windows. Medium light plants like Violets, Dieffenbachia, and Ficus prefer East or West windows. High light plants include Aloe, Cactus, and Croton. They prefer South windows.

All plants benefit from the addition of supplemental light. Fluorescent lights or plant lights can allow enough light to help plants make more food to survive and grow.

Water is another essential factor for plants. The number one killer of house plants is over-watering, especially during the winter months. Plants do not require as much water in winter as they do in summer because plant growth slows due to the light levels and the temperature. The best way to accurately determine if a plant needs water is to stick your finger in the soil about an inch or two, that is if the plant is not pot bound. If it is dry, then water it, and if it is wet, then check it again in a couple of days.

How people water can also adversely affect a plant. A little bit each day is not always good. It is always better to water seldom and thoroughly. In winter, you might only water once a week. When you water, pour enough to saturate the soil and let the excess drain out into the saucer. Let the pot drain for about 15-30 minutes and then discard any excess water that remains. It is important not to let the plants sit in water for prolonged periods of time. This tends to lead to root rot.

Only water with non-softened tap water.

Plants benefit from higher humidity levels. In winter, it is normal for our homes to be only 10 to 20 percent, which is too low for many houseplants. Humidifiers are an excellent way to increase the relative humidity. Many people just place

plants on trays filled with pebbles and water where the bottom of the pot is above the water level.

Fertilization is not necessary in the fall and winter time because most plants grow very little. Fertilizing can begin in late February and March when light levels increase and plant growth begins.

Dust and other materials can accumulate on leaves of houseplants over time. The leaves not only look unattractive, but it can also slow a plants growth by blocking out light. Wash leaves with a soft cloth and lukewarm mild solution of dishwashing soap and water. Leaf shining materials are not recommended.

Plant pests can also be a problem in winter. Keep an eye out for insects or disease problems as you water. If problems arise, consult a professional to see what you need to do. Most of the time, good consistent care should keep them healthy.

If you would like more information, call your local University of Missouri Extension Center and request MU guide sheets: G6510 - Caring for Houseplants, G6511 - Care for Flowering Potted Plants, and G6515 - Lighting Indoor Plants.



# Evergreens

by Sarah Denkler

What comes to mind when hearing the word evergreen? What about the majestic giant sequoia found on the west coast of the U.S or the Norway spruce found towering in many Missouri cemeteries. One might visualize the yew or juniper shrubs that are often found as foundation plantings in front of older houses.

Evergreens come in all shapes, colors and sizes. They are loved partially because of the year round foliage that reminds us all that life continues even into winter. Are you thinking about using an evergreen in your yard. Plan carefully to ensure that you select the correct plant for your space and location.

Many spruce, hemlock, fir and arborvitae do not do as well in this area due to the intense summer heat, wind, winter drying, or the high humidity.

Common evergreens that grow well in southeast Missouri include shortleaf pine, eastern red cedar, Chinese juniper, Japanese yew, Wilson holly and English boxwood.



Wilson holly (below) courtesy of Davesgarden.com. Koreanspice viburnum courtesy of Missouri Botanical Garden.

Other broadleaf evergreens that retain their foliage but are often overlooked as evergreens include rhododendron, southern magnolia, euonymus, and viburnum.

Rhododendron can range from 2 ft. to 12 ft. with blooms in spring. These prefer acid soil and need patient care. Southern magnolia are majestic trees that require large spaces to showcase their white, spring blooms. These trees have good winter interest but often loose their blooms quickly.

Euonymus ranges from a low growing shrub or vine to a 12 ft. tall shrub. These come with variegated foliage and the foliage of some species turn bright red in the fall. Viburnum range in many sizes but are usually grown as a large shrub. They can grow in sun or shade and provide winter interest with berries and foliage. They are showiest in spring when they bloom.

When selecting evergreens, choose for your soil type and for your cold hardiness and summer heat. There are varieties that will meet these requirements but review them ahead of time to avoid death from damage in winter or during the heat of summer.

Place plants according to their final size at maturity. For example a southern magnolia would never be planted near a power line. If there is no other place to plant it then choose another evergreen.



## Repurpose, Reuse, Recycle - Pass It On

When you have donuts or fruit that is past its prime you can slice either in half and hang it outside on a nail for the birds to enjoy.



## Group News - What's Happening

# November 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Poplar Bluff MG, 6:30 pm @ PB Ext. Center	2	3	4	5
6	7 Parkland MG, 6:30pm @ Courthouse Annex (3rd floor)	8 MG training - MAC, Parkhills, MO	9	10	11	12
13	14	15 MG training - MAC, Parkhills, MO	16	17 Cape Girardeau Co. MG, 7 pm, Cape Co. Ext. Center	18	19
20	21 Ste. Genevieve MG Meeting, 6:30pm, at the Ste. Genevieve Co. Ext. Center	22	23	24	25	26
27	28 Perry Co. MG meeting, 6:30 pm, Perry Co. Ext. Center	29	30	Contact your local Extension Center if you have questions about any event on the calendar.		

### Upcoming Events

#### November

- 1 - Poplar Bluff MGs 1st Tuesday at 6:30pm, Butler County Ext. Center
- 4 - MG Training continues @ MAC (Ste. Gen Ext Office 10/18 to 11/15)
- 7 - Parkland MGs 1st Monday at 6:30pm, Farmington Courthouse Annex (3rd Floor)
- 10 - Delta Area MGs 2nd Thursday at 7:00pm, Medical Arts Building, Sikeston, MO
- 17 - Cape Girardeau County MGs 3rd Thursday at Cape County Ext. Center at 7pm.
- 21 - Ste. Genevieve MGs 3rd Monday, at Ste. Gen. County Ext. Center at 6:30pm.
- 28 - Perry County MGs 4th Monday at the Perry County Ext. Center at 6:30pm.

#### December

- 5 - Parkland MGs 1st Monday at 6:30pm, Farmington Courthouse Annex (3rd Floor)
- 6 - Poplar Bluff MGs 1st Tuesday at 6:30pm, Butler County Ext. Center
- 8 - Delta Area MGs 2nd Thursday at 7:00pm, Medical Arts Building, Sikeston, MO
- 15 - Cape Girardeau County MGs 3rd Thursday at Cape County Ext. Center at 7pm.
- 19 - Ste. Genevieve MGs 3rd Monday, at Ste. Gen. County Ext. Center at 6:30pm.
- 26 - Perry County MGs 4th Monday at the Perry County Ext. Center at 6:30pm.

*if you have a horticultural related event for the calendar call 573-686-8064 to add it.*

## Editor's Corner

*The Garden Spade is published monthly by University of Missouri Extension staff for individuals and families living in Southeast and East Central Missouri. This newsletter is provided by your local extension council.*

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We welcome and encourage Master Gardener groups and individuals to submit items to the newsletter. We encourage the submission of any news such as upcoming volunteer opportunities, community events related to gardening, warm wishes or congratulations to fellow gardeners. We also encourage Master Gardeners sharing experiences and writing articles on timely topics.

All entries into the group news sections must be received by 4:30 on the 15th of each month for the following months news.

Email news to: [kammlerk@missouri.edu](mailto:kammlerk@missouri.edu),  
[denklers@missouri.edu](mailto:denklers@missouri.edu), or [aufdenbergd@missouri.edu](mailto:aufdenbergd@missouri.edu)

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**Time To Turn In Your Volunteer Hours For 2011!!**

**The Master Gardener Hour Reporting form can be found at  
<http://mg.missouri.edu/mgforms.htm>**