

# The Gardener's Dirt Newsletter

December 2019

## Feature Article:

### Enliven With Evergreens

By: Eloise Adam, EMGV



Classic Wreath



Magnolia Swag



Christmas Spirit

Decorating our homes (inside and out) is a major part of the Christmas experience; it is also time consuming. "Deck the Halls . . ." with not only the proverbial holly (Ilex), of which there are approximately 400 species, and most of them are evergreen, but a long list of evergreens comes to mind when we start to make our plans.

H-m-m where to begin? Tree? Wreath? Swag? Centerpieces? Mailbox? Let's begin with the tree. The most widely used one is the *Abies frasier* (Fraser Fir) which is readily available at tree lots which make an appearance at Thanksgiving, or before. Its fragrance, shape, strong branches and ability to retain its pliable needles are the qualities that make it ideal. Many people have themes for their trees, e.g. owls. No matter the theme, or no theme at all, they always look beautiful when you have finally emptied the boxes of all the ornaments, and turn on the lights. Just don't forget to water the tree.

When using cut greenery for wreaths, etc. immerse the freshly cut (on the slant) branches in a bucket of warm water and let them drink deeply before usage, preferably for one day. Wire forms for wreaths can be purchased at hobby stores. Some of the greenery you can use is:

- *Cryptomeria japonica* (Japanese Cedar)
- *Juniperus virginiana* (Eastern Red Cedar)
- *Cephalotaxus harringtonia* (Plum Yew)
- *Buxus sempervirens* (American Boxwood)
- *Pinus taeda* (Loblolly Pine).

A simple Fraser Fir wreath with a bright, shiny red bow makes a classic statement. You can also add pine cones and berries for a natural look. Of course you can mix any of the greens for diversity.

Speaking of berries, there are many from which to choose. Three of the favorite ones are:

- *Nandina domestica*'s (Heavenly Bamboo) great clusters, which make a real splash
- *Ilex verticillata* (Winterberry Holly) whose berries grow along the deciduous brown stems
- *Juniperus virginiana*'s (Eastern Red Cedar) blue-gray berries.

All work well in all your creations.

One very popular greenery is the stately *Magnolia grandiflora* (Southern Magnolia). It takes a lot of space because the leaves are so large and are not very pliable. A mantle is a good location for a magnolia arrangement. The branches can be anchored in an oasis to prolong its life. Candles and Christmas figurines look lovely nestled among the shiny leaves.

For smaller arrangements the cultivars of *Magnolia* 'Teddy Bear' and 'Little Gem' work quite well. One of the best greens for a small centerpiece is *Buxus sempervirens* (American Boxwood). Its dark green, small leaves last an unbelievably long time, with regular watering. *Abies frasier* (Fraser Fir) is another popular choice for small arrangements. *Rosmarinus officinalis* (Rosemary) is a good, fragrant green to add to a kitchen table centerpiece and it introduces a new texture.

What is more welcoming at the front door than a beautiful swag of all the aforementioned greenery? Using pine and Fraser Fir adds fragrance. Creating a swag is very simple - just take a handful of different greens, tie them together with wire, work in some bells or other ornaments, add a bow with streamers, and viola! - it's ready to hang.

Another outside place to decorate is the mailbox. Decorations go from simple to elaborate, but somewhere in between is just about right. Using the same technique that was used for the swag is the easy way to do it. Branches of greenery, maybe some berries and a bow and you've got it covered. A decorated mailbox lets all your neighbors know that you're in the spirit.

It's truly amazing how festive, yet very simple, holiday arrangements bring the magic of the season to our homes. Joyous Noel

# Feature Plant:

## Poinsettias!

**Mike Renfrow, owner of Cyn-Mar Inc., Wholesale Florist and Greenhouses**



## Commercial Poinsettia Production History

The poinsettia plant was first grown commercially in the U.S. in 1909. It was grown as a field produced cut flower in Los Angeles by the Ecke Family. Paul Ecke Sr. is given much of the credit for the success and the development of the plant we know today. Over the years, through breeding and selection the poinsettia flower has been transformed into many colors, shapes, and sizes. Most all of which are grown in pots and are marketed worldwide as the true "Christmas Flower". In N.C. alone, there are over a million pots produced commercially each year. (2nd to California)

## Culture (Commercial Production)

Greenhouse operations start with unrooted cuttings in mid to late summer. They are rooted in 3 weeks and potted into the container to be finished in. Poinsettias are a day length sensitive plant (photoperiodic). They start their flowering process at the fall equinox (mid September). Any artificial light after sunset will cause the flowering process to be delayed. Poinsettias are a tropical plant. While in production, night temperatures are kept at 65 degrees for proper growth. Plants are fertilized each time they are watered to insure green leaves and strong stems. Most importantly, the soil they are grown in must be well drained to promote the proper root development.

## Consumer Care Suggestions

Once you acquire your poinsettia to enjoy during the Holiday Season, there are several things you can do to ensure a successful venture.

### 1. Placement:

-never put plant in a drafty area.

-keep away from heat vents.

-locate in a spot that receives indirect sunlight.

-keep night temperature at least 65 degrees.

## **2. Water:**

-if wrapped in foil, make sure to remove wrap to water.

-place plant in sink and water with tap water slowly until water comes out of holes in bottom of pot.

-let the plant drain for an hour before putting the wrap back on the plant (never let the plant sit in standing water, will kill roots).

-most plants will need water at least once a week, do not over water (a little on the dry side is much better than too wet).

## **3. Fertilizer:**

-fertilizer is not necessary for the plant until after Christmas (most commercial growers will fertilize plants right up to shipping).

-if you plan to keep your plant after Christmas, use a balanced fertilizer for blooming plants and follow as directed.

Poinsettias are a labor of love for most commercial growers. We here at Cyn-Mar are growing the company's 64th consecutive poinsettia crop. This year we will be growing over 20 different varieties and 10 different sizes. Our poinsettia sales are an integral part of our yearly production program.

**Enjoy your poinsettia this year!**

**A final note, POINSETTIAS are not poisonous! Ask your extension agent or go online and check it out.**

<https://www.facebook.com/CynMarGreenhouses/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdg2Hp0BEJo&feature=youtu.be>

**Grow Native:**

**Loropetalum 'Cerise Charm'**

By: Barb Barakat, EMGV





Courtesy of StarRosesAndPlants.com

Loropetalum has long been a favorite to add color and texture to any landscape. Unlike some of its cousins, this cultivar 'Cerise Charm' is dwarf, reaching a manageable mature height of 2-3 feet. An evergreen, with dark plum, almost black, small leaf foliage that doesn't fade even in the unforgiving heat of the Southeast. Cerise Charm blooms in spring and will add winter interest.

Size: 2-3 ft

Spread: 3-4 ft

Blooms: hot pink clusters of fringe-shaped flowers in April, winter interest

Site: full sun to part shade

Water: weekly watering, prefers moist, slightly acidic (pH 6), well-drained soils

Tolerates Harsh Conditions: zones 7-11; protect from winter winds in freezing temps

Maintenance: low, does not require pruning

Disease or Insect Problems: generally problem free, deer resistant

Cultivars:

Dwarf: 3'

'Cerise Charm'

'Purple Pixie'

Semi-dwarf: 5'

'Purple diamond'

Full Size: 6-10'

Loropetalum chinense 'Ruby'

'Rubrum'

'Hillier Form'

'Snow Dance'

'Roseum'

'Snow Muffin'

'Razzel Dazzel'

Loropetalum is an eye-catching shrub with a vase-shaped growth habit and lovely, spreading canopy. It is a great addition to any landscape.

Here is another informational link about Loropetalum plants:

**[Versatile Loropetalum Creates A Dramatic Display](#)**

## Quick Tip:

### Christmas trees in your pond?

By: Brandon Parker, Johnston County Extension Commercial Horticulture Agent

As we are now in full swing Christmas mode with millions of Christmas trees being purchased to decorate our homes all across the country, the question will come in just a few short weeks, "What do I do with my tree when Christmas is over?" There is a simple answer: Place them in your pond or a pond you have permission to do so in. This provides excellent structure and habitat for smaller baitfish to live and spawn for years to come, while also providing an area for sportfish to congregate and hunt for food. For those who may enjoy fishing, this also provides an excellent spot to target your favorite freshwater fish!

*Below are some resource articles about the benefits of Christmas trees in your pond*

[Spruce Up Your Pond](#)

[Christmas Trees for Improved Fish Habitat](#)



## Veggie Tale:

### *Giving and Caring for Gift Plants*

By: Joanne King, EMGV



*Amaryllis*



*Paperwhite Narcissus*



*Christmas Cactus*

With the holidays approaching, there will be plenty of plant choices in the stores for gift-giving, or to brighten up your home. As with your own home, try to be aware of the recipient's environment so it will be sustainable for them. Almost all house plants with great holiday color need indirect sunlight. So, if the recipient lives up north where there are more cloudy days in winter than sunshine, and inside temperatures around 60, it might be better to send a cut flower or evergreen arrangement. House plants do best in consistent temperatures (usually between 60-70 degrees) and protection from drafts. They need to be kept away from outside doors or up against cold windows, or in front of the roaring fire. Indoor plants do not like to be overwatered. Make sure the pot has drainage holes, wait until the plant is nearly dry, use room temperature water, and don't let the plant stand in water.

When you select a plant as a gift, be sure to inspect the soil, the pot, the roots (white or tan are healthy) and its overall condition. Protect it from cold or wind when transporting it. A mail-order provider is another option, but use one that has a good reputation for quality plants and shipping (that is, not leaving it on a cold porch) and a guarantee policy. Or call a florist, local to the recipient, who can deliver the gift directly.

Poinsettias are a favorite due to their stunning colors. You want a plant that has lots of fully colored leaves (no green edges on red leaves). Avoid plants with yellowing or curling leaves which is indicative of overwatering. See the following link if you want to keep the plant and get it to rebloom next season.

[How to care for your poinsettia beyond the holidays](#)

Amaryllis is a stunning plant and easy to grow. A bulb takes 6-8 weeks to bloom so time your purchase accordingly. They don't like too much soil as it lends itself to holding water. If you are giving an amaryllis just about to bloom, closer to the holidays, choose one with a pot that is not too big for the bulb. They like to be a little crowded. For specific steps for care after it blooms, see more "Care for Amaryllis" at this link -- [Growing Amaryllis Bulbs](#)

Like amaryllis, paperwhite narcissus is fun to grow. Usually purchased as bulbs, they bloom in 4-6 weeks and the fragrant flowers last 2-3 weeks. You can easily plant bulbs by filling a tall vase to about ¼ with pebbles. Place the bulbs on top and keep the water level just touching the base of the bulb. Turn it frequently to ensure upright growth. Once blooms appear, it can be moved to a lower light location. Paperwhite bulbs can rebloom, but bulbs are readily available and inexpensive, so it may not be worth the extra effort.

The stems get long so they will need some support, like a tall vase or bowl, or stakes. Studies have shown that watering the bulbs with an alcohol mixture (as in gin or vodka) can decrease the height of the stems without affecting the flowering. For more on paperwhites,

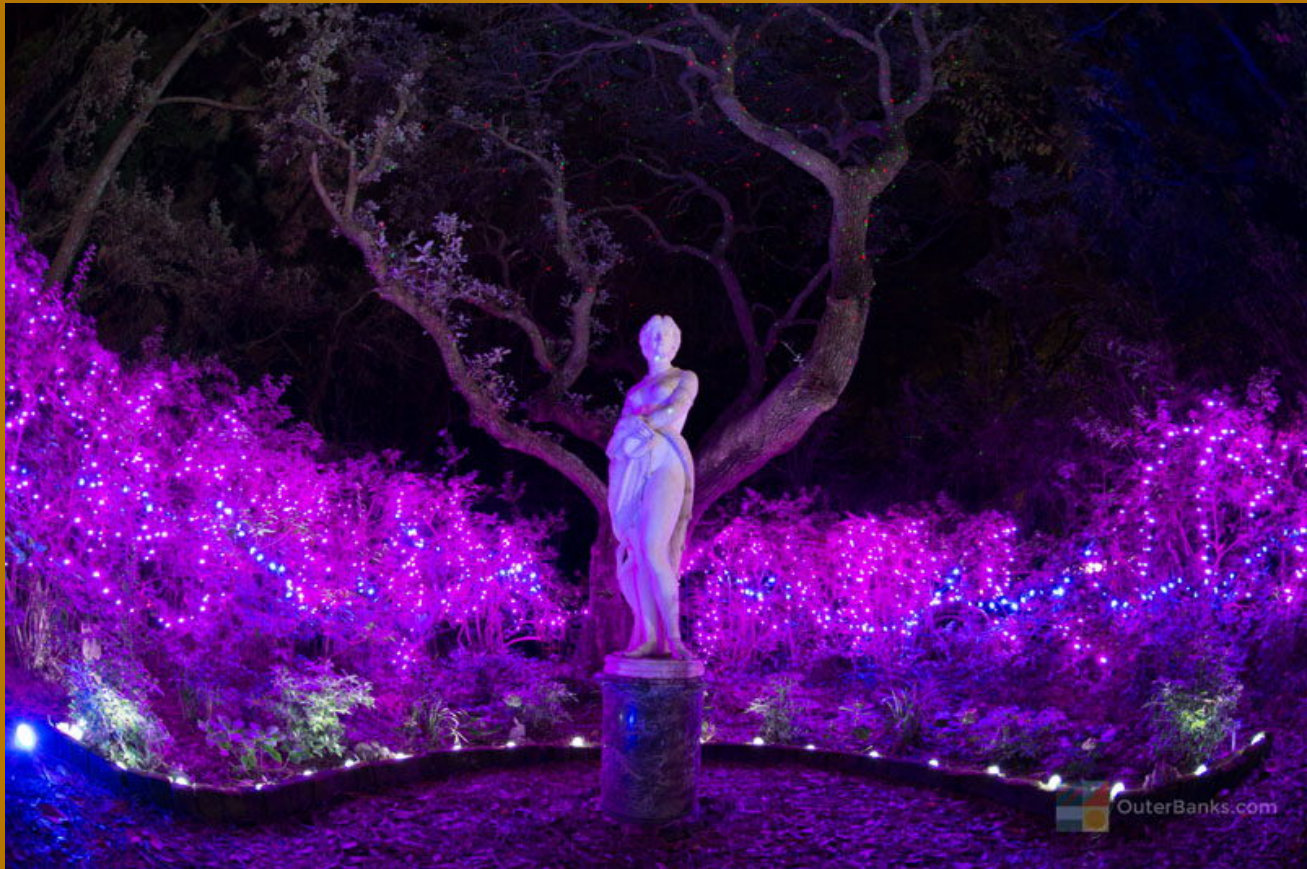


see this link -- [Give your paperwhites an alcoholic drink](#)

A Christmas cactus is available in stores as it begins budding. They prefer bright diffused light but can adapt to low light locations. In a dry home, give it an occasional mist to increase humidity. Do not overwater as cacti are susceptible to root disease, so let the water drain out. They are easy to propagate so it is a great "pass-along" plant. For more on Christmas cactus, including how to get them to rebloom the next year, see this link -- [Christmas Cactus Care](#)

There are many great plant choices for low light conditions in the home. However, plants that will flower or produce great holiday color in low light are limited. One option is a Chinese evergreen, or algaonema, which is an attractive houseplant, with dark green leaves and streaks of red or pink. It can take indirect sun but will do well in low light, even in fluorescent lighting, making it a good choice for an office.

## ***December Gardening Tasks***



Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo, NC

### **GENERAL REMINDERS**

- Winterize your outdoor water pumps, pto pumps, power washers and anything else that may freeze and break. Don't leave hose pipes screwed to faucets when extended freezing weather is expected.
- Prune evergreens to use for winter decorations in the house by cutting out unwanted limbs that would be pruned in February anyway. Save major



pruning for late winter. Holly, Magnolia, Cedar, and Nandina foliage will last a long time.

- Prevent winter damage to plants from desiccation (drying out), freezing and thawing, and breakage from ice and snow loads. Keep plants watered during dry periods.
- This is an excellent time to mulch shrubs, trees, perennials, and herbs for winter protection. Apply a layer 3 inch deep since most perennials are dormant and it's easy to get a wheelbarrow into the garden.
- Put your cut Holiday tree to use! Cut the branches and lay them over perennials to protect them from the cold. Shred small branches to make mulch.
- Do NOT prune fruit trees now. Fruit trees are best pruned late winter just before they start to grow in spring. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/training-and-pruning-fruit-trees-in-north-carolina>
- Asparagus crowns can be planted now through March.

## **WILDLIFE**

- Clean bird feeders monthly with hot sudsy water and diluted bleach to prevent the spread of wild bird diseases. Keep seed hulls from accumulating underneath the feeder to discourage rodents.

## **LAWN CARE**

- Promptly remove fallen tree leaves from the lawn to prevent smothering that cause dead areas.
- Check out the [Lawn Maintenance Calendar](#) for your grass and learn how best to care for it.

*Click on each type of grass for link to maintenance schedule:*

- [Bermuda](#)
- [Centipede](#)
- [Zoysiagrass](#)
- [St. Augustine Grass](#)
- [Tall Fescue](#)
- For cool season grasses, mow to 3 inches and remove leaves and other debris.
  - Cool-season weeds in established dormant Zoysia or Bermuda grass lawns may be treated with broadleaf herbicides.
  - NEVER burn off centipedegrass to remove excess debris.
  - Selected herbicides (like atrazine or simazine) can be applied to control annual bluegrass and several annual broadleaf weeds. Read label directions to see if these herbicides can be used on your grass type.

## ***Cool Connections:***



**Helpful Links from Johnston County Cooperative Extension**

***\*NEW\* Cool Connections - Gardening Resources for ALL!***

***Basic Steps for Home Landscaping***

***Carolina Lawns***

***NC Extension Gardener Handbook***

***Vegetable Gardening: A Beginners Guide***

## ***Upcoming Events:***

**Extension Master Gardener Training Class  
Registration is now OPEN!**



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS](#)

## Blueberry & Grape Production & Pruning Workshop

February 8th, 2020 from 1:30 - 5:00 PM

Join Johnston County Cooperative Extension and NCSU Extension Specialist Dr. Bill Cline for an introductory workshop on blueberry and grape production and pruning on Saturday, February 8th, 2020 from 1:30 - 5:00 PM at the Johnston County Agricultural Center (2736 NC 210 Hwy., Smithfield 27577). Topics include cultivar selection, budgeting, site establishment (soil conditions and planting), fertilization, irrigation, pruning, harvesting, and resources for pest control. Workshop includes a lecture followed by a pruning demonstration at a local farm. The program is aimed at farmers considering establishing "pick-your-own" operations as well as home gardeners.

There is no cost to attend the workshop.

Dress for probable cold weather for the outdoor pruning demonstration.

For accommodations for persons with disabilities,  
contact Marshall Warren at 919-989-5380.

*For more information on growing and pruning blueberries, visit*

**NC State Blueberry Portal at:**

<https://blueberries.ces.ncsu.edu/>



**Muscadine Grape Production:**

[https://grapes.ces.ncsu.edu/muscadine\\_grape\\_production/](https://grapes.ces.ncsu.edu/muscadine_grape_production/)

## **Fruit & Nut Tree Workshop**

**Saturday, February 22, 2019 from 10 am to 12 pm.**



Class workshop on fruit and nut trees by Dr. Mike Parker. This event will be located at Central Crops Research Station, 13223 US 70 West, Clayton, NC 27520-2128. If you have any questions about this event, please contact our office at (919) 989-5380. Thank you.



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Accommodation requests related to a disability should be made 7 days prior to any event by contacting:  
Bryant Spivey at 919-989-5380 or by email [bmspivey@ncsu.edu](mailto:bmspivey@ncsu.edu).

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