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## Dougherty County Hort Depot

### *Special Holiday Edition*

Edited by James Morgan & Teresa Myler

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### **A Healthy Christmas Tree is the First Step to Decking The Halls**

By Savannah Colbert

As temperatures drop and Christmas carols begin playing on the radio, the time to search for the right tree is here. People have been buying and decorating trees to celebrate Christmas for more than 500 years. Almost 30 million live Christmas trees are sold in the U.S. every year. UGA Extension experts share these tips for choosing the right tree.



#### Planning ahead:

- Moorhead said to "check the height of your ceiling before leaving the house," and buy a tree a foot shorter than this to be sure it will fit comfortably inside.
- Think about the taper and fullness you need, based on the room you are putting it in.

#### Picking the tree:

- The freshest trees will be available at choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms. Buying trees from farms also supports local farmers.
- Shake the tree before you buy it. Lots of needles falling off is a bad sign that can indicate a dead tree.
- Check for insects and dead needles around the middle of the tree as these could also indicate a dead tree.
- Be careful not to pick a droopy looking tree, this probably means it's gone too long without water.
- Pick a tree with a straight trunk that is between six and eight inches long. This will make it easier to cut the base and put it in a stand.

#### Caring for the tree:

- When you get home with your tree, cut an inch off of the base and immediately put it in water.
- The tree should go in a stand that holds at least one gallon of water. Plain water, without sugar or fertilizer, is best for the tree.
- Make sure to check the water supply for the tree, especially when you've just gotten it because "the first couple of days the tree will go through a lot of water," Moorhead said.



#### Options for recycling your tree:

- Use the main stem for firewood.
- Create a fish attractor by weighting the tree and sinking it to the bottom of a pond.
- Grind the tree for mulch.
- Take it to a box store that will chip the wood and donate it.
- Donate your tree to "Bring One for the Chipper," a Keep Georgia Beautiful program that recycles Christmas trees by making them into mulch for use in community projects.

## *Holiday House Plants* by Heather Kolich

There's no better holiday décor than classic holiday house plants like poinsettia, cyclamen and Christmas cacti. Not only do they bring a touch of tropical cheer during dreary Georgia winters, they can last for years with a little extra care.

The first step in prolonging the life of holiday plants is to remove their festive foil wrapping. None of these plants like to have their roots standing in water, and the foil keeps excess water from draining away.



Poinsettias can last for years as foliage plants. Their colorful display isn't actually from flowers. The beautiful red, pink and ivory "petals" are really leaves that have experienced a strict schedule of light and dark periods under greenhouse conditions.

With proper care, they can maintain their color for months. These plants need at least six hours of bright, indirect light every day; frequent watering; and a stable temperature between 65 and 70 degrees. When the colored leaves fade, cut the plant back to around 10 inches and move it to a larger pot. Poinsettias can live outdoors in a sheltered place until temperatures become frosty.

Cyclamen is like a phoenix. It dies occasionally so it will live again in beauty. Its wing-like flowers - which can be white, pink, rose or crimson - hover above heart-shaped leaves on long stems. Cyclamens are water sensitive; they like to be moist, but letting them get dry or too wet injures them. They prefer cool temperatures (50-60 degrees Fahrenheit) and indirect sun, so place them in a north or east facing window that receives filtered light.

When the flowers fade, slowly decrease watering until the leaves die, then don't water at all for six weeks. This lets the tuberous root rest for the next round of blooms. Leaves will reappear when you resume watering.

Holiday cacti - which bloom around Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter depending on the variety - bloom for around six weeks if they have plenty of bright sunlight and moderate moisture. Sunny, south-facing windows are the best place for these plants.

When blooms fade, pluck them off and give the plant a dose of houseplant fertilizer. In warm weather, holiday cacti can live outdoors in semi-shaded spots.

### *New uses for other holiday leftovers*

Cut greenery like Christmas trees and wreaths can enjoy new life, too. Christmas trees make natural, easy wildlife habitats. Tossed into a woody, secluded area, post-season Christmas trees give homes to a variety of critters, including forest insects, fungi, birds and small mammals. Weighted and sunken, Christmas trees provide fish in ponds and lakes with a place to shelter and spawn. Just be sure to get a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers before sinking a tree into navigable waters, like Lake Lanier.

If you don't care to create a wildlife habitat, Christmas trees and wreath greenery can still contribute to the environment through recycling. Remove all lights and ornaments, first. Wood chips from ground-up greenery are useful for mulching nature trails and walkways. Your local solid waste or waste management department may offer community tree recycling, so it never hurts to call and ask.

Cardboard shipping boxes that were once filled with presents have garden uses, too. When winter winds howl and temperatures drop below freezing, use the boxes to cover outdoor ornamental plants to protect and insulate them. If it's really cold, boxes can support blankets or mulch for extra warmth.

To prepare for new planting beds, place flattened boxes directly on the ground, weighed down with rocks, mulch, or raised bed structures, to kill grass and weeds prior to digging. Heavy cardboard is also a money-saver for mulched areas. Starting with a layer or two of cardboard means you reach weed-squelching depth (3-5 inches) with less purchased mulch.

## **Plants as Gifts** by Sharon Dowdy (UGA, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences)



House plants make great holiday gifts, but gift givers should be careful to make sure their gift plant is healthy. Otherwise, that cheery Christmas cactus or festive fern can turn into a pot full of heartache by mid-January.

Bodie Pennisi, a researcher on the University of Georgia campus in Griffin, Ga., recommends giving each plant a good check-up before buying it as a gift.

### **Check the leaves and roots**

"You should purchase only healthy looking plants with medium to dark green foliage. That is unless the foliage is supposed to be a different color," said Pennisi, a horticulturist with the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. "If the plant is unhealthy at the nursery, chances are it will decline and may even die soon after you purchase it."

Avoid plants with unnaturally spotted, yellow, or brown leaves. And, check under the plant's leaves for hitchhiking pests. If you're shopping for ferns, do not be alarmed if you see brown-colored spots or long rows of structures on the lower leaf surface. These "spots" are reproductive structures called spores.

### **Nursery owners may frown on Pennisi's next tip.**

"Remove the plant from the pot and examine the root system. Healthy roots generally are and should be visible along the outside of the soil ball and should have an earthy smell," she said. "Unhealthy roots also may smell foul."

Black, brown or discolored roots are typically signs of problems. But some plants, like Dracaenas, have roots with colors other than white.

### **Pick the right pot for your plant**

Attractive planters can enhance the decorative value of the plants. Consider the following when selecting a planter: the plant's needs; the needs of the individual and the environment; cost and availability; strength and durability; drainage and weight.

The style, shape and size of the container should complement the plant. Small containers are best for small slow-growing plants and larger containers are better suited for fast-growing ones. Containers can be terra cotta, clay, plastic or ceramic.

"Terra cotta pots, made of fired clay, are some of the most popular choices, with designs ranging from plain to ornate," Pennisi said. "Plants perform very well in terra cotta pots, as the porous surface allows good air exchange between the plant roots and the environment."

Other non-terra cotta clay containers range from gray to brown in color, depending on the clay type. Clay pots can be glazed or unglazed. "The glazed pots restrict air exchange, but offer more design choices," she said. "Unglazed pots evaporate water faster, and plants in them may need more frequent watering."

Disadvantages of clay containers include the fact that they are fragile, can break and be heavy (especially large pots).

### **Plastic doesn't break, but it doesn't breathe either**

Plastic pots range from very simple to quite elaborate. They are constructed of materials like polyethylene, polyurethane, recycled plastic and fiberglass.

Their advantages include being lightweight as well as chip- and break-resistant. Air exchange and water evaporation rates are generally lower in plastic containers compared with clay containers. Plants in plastic pots will not dry out as quickly as plants in clay pots, increasing the danger of over-watering.

In general, planters either have drainage holes or don't have drainage holes. Do not allow plants in containers with drainage holes to sit in saucers filled with water, unless the plant is suspended above the water level by a layer of rocks.

"Containers without drainage holes work well for plants such as the Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum*), which needs plenty of water, but they should not be used for cacti and succulents," Pennisi said.

If you reuse containers, clean them by washing out any old compost, chemical or paint residues. Sterilize the container by placing it in a 10 percent bleach solution and rinse well.

For a list of popular indoor plants, see the UGA CAES publication website at [www.caes.uga.edu/publications](http://www.caes.uga.edu/publications).

## RoseMERRY Christmas!

By Louise Estabrook (UGA Cooperative Extension)

Rosemary plants are gaining popularity as a holiday gift and miniature, living Christmas tree. After the holidays, you can use it as an indoor houseplant. With a little care, holiday rosemary plants can be added to the landscape in the spring.

Botanically speaking, *Rosmarinus officinalis* is an aromatic, woody shrub that originated in the Mediterranean. The word "rosemary" is derived from the Latin *rosmarinus*, meaning, "dew of the sea." This refers to where it grows natively, among the misty hills of the Mediterranean coast, in France, Italy, Spain and the Dalmatian Islands.

Rosemary is an herb steeped in history, and valued for many reasons. It was used in wine, perfumes and medicines. It was also used as an air purifier and aromatic kitchen herb. And it may help repel mosquitoes when planted near patios or porches.

During the holiday season, rosemary plants are often sheared into formal topiaries or Christmas tree shapes. Most of the rosemary plants sold during the holiday season were grown in greenhouses. Therefore, they don't react kindly to being transported, displayed and then carried through the cold into the dry warmth of heated homes.

In northern Georgia, rosemary plants are relatively inexpensive and easy to come by. Every light touch of the needle-like leaves releases enough fragrance to perfume an entire room. Even if the plants don't survive indoors past the holiday season, they make wonderful temporary houseplants.

It's mostly the dry heat in our homes that make survival difficult for rosemary plants. Raising the humidity level can help the plant survive. Also keep the plant away from direct sunlight, heat registers, fireplaces, televisions and other heat sources.

Routinely spray the leaves several times a day with water from a hand mister. Place the plant's container on a tray of stones or marbles so that as the water evaporates, it helps humidify the plant. Clustering houseplants together also helps keep foliage hydrated.

In late winter, if your rosemary plant is still living, start placing it outside in a sheltered spot during the day. Protect it from drying winds, and you may be rewarded by new growth. After it has acclimated itself to the outdoors, you can safely plant it outside where the rosemary plant will thrive year round.

Rosemary does best in slightly alkaline, well-drained soil and can handle either full sun or light shade. It can grow to be 3 to 5 feet in height, and because of its Mediterranean origins, rosemary is naturally drought resistant once it becomes established.

With a little extra care, the gift of a rosemary plant can survive and become a remembrance of the holiday season and add seasoning to your favorite recipes.

For more information about reestablishing holiday rosemary bushes outside after the season, search for the UGA Extension publication "Herbs in the Southern Garden" at [www.caes.uga.edu/publications](http://www.caes.uga.edu/publications).



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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 <a href="#">National Mutt Day</a> 	3 New Moon ●	4  <a href="#">National Hand-washing Awareness Week 1-7</a>	5 <a href="#">International Ninja Day</a> 		7 <a href="#">Pearl Harbor Day</a>
8  <a href="#">Worldwide Candle Lighting Day</a>	9 First Quarter ◐	10	11	12	13	14 <a href="#">National Day of the Horse</a> 
15	16	17 Full Moon ○	18	19	20	21 Winter Solstice Winter Begins!
			<a href="#">American Christmas Bird Count Dec. 14 – Jan. 5</a>			
22	23 <a href="#">Festivus</a> 	24 Last Quarter ◑	25 Christmas 	26	27	28 <a href="#">Pledge of Allegiance Day</a> 
29 <a href="#">Tick Tock Day</a> 	30	31 New Year's Eve 				

Looking for local honey? Look no further than  
 Ron Wolfe at 229-291-4207 (Dougherty County) Wildflower Honey  
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### Christmas Trees Word Search

N E E H O W Q T Q S H O D P E X P S Y H D F W N  
 O E N I P D E R H Y S O V N Y V H V Y C F G H O  
 E N I P H C T O C S U E I W H I T E P I N E I B  
 K X P L Z J W L N G C P R M E Z U X S R A Q T L  
 N U A J T Y N H L R N G K P L C H L T S R X E E  
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 S D A A I E Q D X U D X H F L H F G B O K X T T  
 R V S R X E E G V A X P I U A H M J P T Y S V V

- AUSTRIAN PINE
- BALSAM FIR
- BLUE SPRUCE
- DOUGLAS FIR
- EASTERN RED CEDAR
- FRASER FIR
- GRAND FIR
- LEYLAND CYPRESS
- NOBLE FIR
- NORWAY SPRUCE
- PONDEROSA PINE
- RED PINE
- SCOTCH PINE
- VIRGINIA PINE
- WHITE FIR
- WHITE PINE
- WHITE SPRUCE

**The following Christmas Tree species or types are sold and grown in the United States.**

**Eastern Red Cedar** – *Juniperus virginiana* – leaves are a dark, shiny, green color; sticky to the touch; good scent; can dry out quickly; may last just 2-3 weeks; the berries of *Juniperus* species are used to provide gin with its characteristic flavor. Cedar chests and lined closets prevent moth damage to wool clothing because the volatile cedar oil is a natural insecticide.

**Leyland Cypress** – *Cupress ocyparis leylandii* – foliage is dark green to gray color; has upright branches with a feathery appearance; has a light scent; good for people with allergies to other Christmas tree types. One of the most sought after Christmas trees in the Southeastern United States.

**Balsam Fir** – *Abies balsamea* – ¾" to 1½" short, flat, long lasting needles that are rounded at the tip; nice, dark green color with silvery cast and fragrant. Named for the balsam or resin found in blisters on bark. Resin is used to make microscope slides and was sold like chewing gum; used to treat wounds in Civil War.

**Douglas-Fir** – *Pseudotsuga menziesii* – good fragrance; holds blue to dark green; 1" to 1½" needles; needles have one of the best aromas among Christmas trees when crushed. Named after David Douglas who studied the tree in the 1800's; good conical shape; can live for a thousand years. Douglas-fir is considered the second tallest tree in North America, after redwood and can grow over 300 ft. tall.

**Fraser Fir** – *Abies fraseri* – dark green, flattened needles; ½ to 1 inch long; good needle retention; nice scent; pyramid-shaped strong branches which turn upward. Named for a botanist, John Fraser, who explored the southern Appalachians in the late 1700's.

**Grand Fir** – *Abies grandis* – shiny, dark green needles about 1"–1½ long; the needles when crushed, give off a citrusy smell. Grand fir's sweet pitch was once chewed by Native Americans.

**Noble Fir** – *Abies procera* – one inch long, bluish-green needles with a silvery appearance; has short, stiff branches; great for heavier ornaments; keeps well; is used to make wreaths, door swags and garland.

**White Fir or Concolor Fir** – *Abies concolor* – blue-green needles are ½ to 1½ inches long; nice shape and good aroma, a citrus scent; good needle retention. In nature can live to 350 years.

**Austrian Pine** – *Pinus nigra* – dark green needles, 4 to 6 inches long; retains needles well; moderate fragrance.

**Red Pine** – *Pinus resinosa* – dark green needles 4"-6" long; big and bushy.

**Ponderosa Pine** – *Pinus ponderosa* – needles lighter colored than Austrian Pine; good needle retention; needles 5" – 10" long. Ponderosa pine is an extremely important timber species in western North America (second only to Douglas-fir) and an icon in western coniferous forests.

**Scots or Scotch Pine** – *Pinus sylvestris* – most common Christmas tree; stiff branches; stiff, dark green needles 1 inch long; holds needles for four weeks; needles will stay on even when dry; has open appearance and more room for ornaments; keeps aroma throughout the season; introduced into United States by European settlers.

**Virginia Pine** – *Pinus virginiana* – dark green needles are 1 ½"– 3" long in twisted pairs; strong branches enabling it to hold heavy ornaments; strong aromatic pine scent; a popular southern Christmas tree.

**White Pine** – *Pinus strobus* – soft, blue-green needles, 2 to 5 inches long in bundles of five; retains needles throughout the holiday season; very full appearance; little or no fragrance; less allergic reactions as compared to more fragrant trees. Largest pine in United States; slender branches will support fewer and smaller decorations as compared to Scotch pine. Native Americans used the inner bark as food. Early colonists used the inner bark to make cough medicine. White pine (also called ship-mast pine) had a pivotal role in the American Revolution, and provided lumber for colonial expansion westward.

**Blue Spruce** – *Picea pungens* – dark green to powdery blue; very stiff needles, ¾" to 1½" long; good form; will drop needles in a warm room; symmetrical; but is best among species for needle retention; branches are stiff and will support many heavy decorations. It can live in nature 600-800 years.

**Norway Spruce** – *Picea abies* – needles ½"-1" long and shiny, dark green. Needle retention is poor without proper care; strong fragrance; nice conical shape. Very popular in Europe.

**White Spruce** – *Picea glauca* – needles ½ to ¾ inch long; green to bluish-green, short, stiff needles; crushed needles have an unpleasant odor; good needle retention. A conifer of northern forests.