

Earthly Elements

"Helpful Information From The Trenches"

Issue 4

Winter Edition

December 2002

The Winter Chill

Another winter season is upon us. Most of you know that I have a great distaste for cold weather and snow. Yes, I would rather be in warmer climate, at least during the winter months. To answer your question as to what I do in the winter, the photo on page 4 may give you some idea. All kidding aside, I stay busy taking classes as well as educating others on a variety of gardening and landscape topics. I also assemble this newsletter, and yes, **REST!**

This month I've put together bits and pieces to help you enjoy your holidays and safeguard your plants from harsh winter weather.



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Oh, Christmas Tree



A live Christmas tree indoors is a romantic idea, but it's not for everyone. It's nice to decorate a Norfolk Island Pine, Palm, Fig, or some other plant or tree that's already thriving indoors, but think twice about hosting a newly bought tree for Christmas. Bringing a container grown or balled-and-burlapped tree into a dry, heated house can shock the tree. Plus, after a week inside, the tree may break dormancy, and it might die inside, or when placed outside again.

If a live tree isn't for you, consider a cut tree. Cut Christmas trees are a renewable, recyclable resource, unlike plastic trees. According to the National Christmas Tree Association, about 1 million acres of land from all 50 states are used to grow Christmas trees. Each acre of trees provides the daily oxygen of 18 people. In the U.S., we buy around 33 million Christmas trees each holiday season. For each one cut, growers plant an average of two or three seedlings.



Watch the Salt



Salt poured onto icy roads may protect your car from a winter roller coaster ride, but it can doom your roadside plantings. Use these tips to protect your plants:

1. Avoid pouring salt or other deicing material near plants along sidewalks or driveways, or where the contaminated snow will melt onto plants. Extension educator Ron Wolford from Urban Gardening's University of Illinois Extension Service recommends mixing deicing salts with abrasives such as sand, cinders, or ash on hills, steps, and walkways to lessen the negative impact on plants. If you have to use deicers, use ones containing more plant-friendly **calcium chloride** instead of the harsher sodium chloride.
2. Shovel snow tainted by salt or deicers away from plants.
3. Plant less-salt-tolerant trees away from sidewalks, driveways, or anywhere that snow-melt pools. These include crab apple (*Malus* spp.), English Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), European Euonymus (*Euonymus europaeus*), Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), Northern Red Oak (*Quercus nigra*), and White Spruce (*Picea glauca*).
4. Place barriers in front of sensitive plants in high-salt areas. Wolford recommends using burlap, plywood, or plastic to create an obstacle between your plants and the snow. He also suggests diluting sodium-laced snow with freshwater if conditions warm above freezing for a few days.



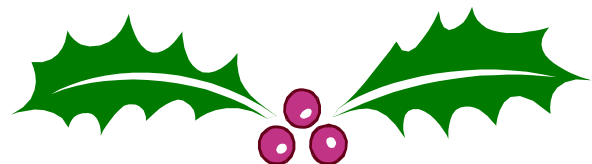
How Dry I Am....

Did you know that loss of water, is one of the biggest winter problems for plants such as evergreens? If you want to help prepare tender evergreens such as Hollies, Rhododendrons, or Magnolias for cold weather consider using an anti-transpirant spray to help them retain moisture during drying winter winds and cold stress.



These products, marketed under trade-names such as Wilt-Pruf, are generally made of a horticultural oil emulsion that coats leaves and needles, lessening the effects of moisture loss. Anti-desiccant sprays are best used on special landscape shrubs or spotlighted evergreens. If you, find yourself forced to try and protect too many of your plants, you probably have them planted in the wrong place.

FINAL TIP: You can delay needle drop and the other dry-out effects that Christmas trees, wreaths, and greens suffer in warm houses by spraying them once with anti-transpirant before you bring them indoors.



*In the depths of winter
I finally learned
that within me there lay
an invincible summer*

—*Albert Camus*

WHITE CHRISTMAS FUDGE

- 2 1/2 cups confectioners sugar
 - 2/3 cup milk
 - 1/4 cup butter or margarine
 - 12 ozs. white chocolate,
(coarsely chopped)
 - 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
(optional)
 - 3/4 cup dried cherries, cranberries,
or apricots, (coarsely chopped)
 - 3/4 cup toasted. almond slices
1. Line 8-inch square pan with foil; grease foil.
 2. Mix confectioners sugar and milk in a heavy 3-quart saucepan. Over medium heat, add butter, and stirring constantly, bring to boil. With out stirring, boil constantly for 5 minutes.
 3. Over low heat, add chocolate & almond extract. Stir, then whisk, until chocolate melts and mixture is smooth. Stir in dried cherries & toasted almonds. Pour mixture into prepared pan.
 4. Refrigerate 2 hours until firm. Invert pan, peel off foil, and cut into 1-inch squares. Garnish as desired.
(Makes 36 squares)

Dazzling Poinsettias



It's the holidays, & that means it must be time for those beautiful poinsettias to grace doorways and hearths. Ever wonder just where this plant originally came from? Stop & think about it for a minute. Have you ever noticed that you never see poinsettias decorating the set in holiday movies such as *A Christmas Carol*? That's because until the 1920s, poinsettias were unknown except as a native shrub of western Mexico. It took years of work, intensive production, and clever marketing to make them today's acknowledged "holiday" plant. In the U.S. between 60 & 70 million potted poinsettias are sold every holiday season. Poinsettias are named after botanist Joel Poinsett of South Carolina, who "discovered" and bred them when he was the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico in the 1820s.

By 1920, plantsman Paul Ecke, Sr. saw the potential of these wonderfully colored plants, and he began to develop pot-sized poinsettias for the home holiday season. To the Paul Ecke Ranch, now in Encinitas, California, is the world's foremost breeder of poinsettias and currently offers 59 cultivars-including pink, white, and yellow ones, as well as ones that are variegated and mottled. Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are from the spurge family, which includes the ubiquitous snow-on-the-mountain, (*E. marginate*).

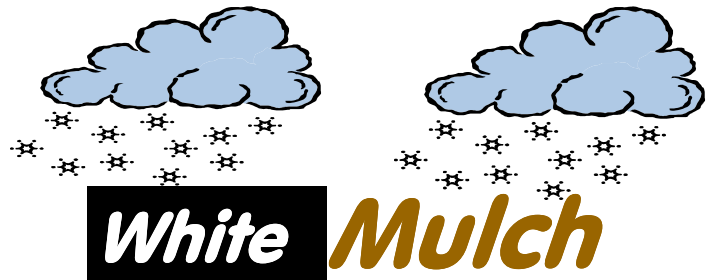
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Poinsettia Care & Feeding

After the seasonal festivities, you can keep your poinsettia as a houseplant. To do so, first cut your plant back hard, past the colored bracts to the green leaves. (**Caution:** when cut, the plant will “bleed” a white milky sap that can be irritating to the skin. If you come in direct contact with it, wash hands immediately with soap & water). Keep the plant in indirect daylight, a west-facing window is good for at least six hours a day. The temperature should stay between 60 and 70°F. Avoid drafts, cold spots, and dry air from heat ducts. Keep the soil moist, but not wet. Fertilize as you would any houseplant. Next winter, your plant will change color once again if you manipulate the amount of light it gets. Wait until about eight to 10 weeks before you want your plant to show color, and then put it some place where it will get less than 11 hours of light a day. Don't expose the plant to light during the night, or the color will be delayed.



Have A Wonderful Holiday Season!



Want an easy way to add a layer of winter mulch? Let nature do it for you. Although unpredictable, as it has been the last few years, **snow** when piled on a frozen garden bed keeps soil and root temperatures relatively constant. It can also help prevent low-growing plants (ex. Coral Bells) from heaving out of the ground. Heavy, wet snow, however, can be devastating to the branches of trees & shrubs. It's best, where & if possible to brush any heavy snow off these plants with a broom.

Gardener Gatherings

Places to Go & Things to Learn

What & Where

"Great Greens 2002"

Matthaei Botanical Gardens

December 14, 10 am - 12 pm

Create your own small-space tree using fresh cut greens on a 42" topiary stand that is yours to reuse as you please in any season. Registration fee: \$40 non-member \$35 member. Deadline for registration is December 6.

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