

Earthly Elements

"Helpful Information From The Trenches"

Issue 4

Winter Edition

December 2003

Let It Snow....I Say NO!

Winter.....again.....awww, do we have to???

Seems that's the way I look at winter, especially as I get older. Yes, I'm grateful for a rest but does it have to be so cold....and what about that white stuff? I do however know that "to every time there is a purpose under heaven".

Well, since we can't do anything to stop it might as well enjoy it! To help bring joy into your holiday & winter, this issue is loaded with helps & hints for the season.



In This Issue

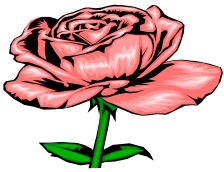
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Mistletoe Magic



Pucker up! The holidays wouldn't be complete without a sprig of mistletoe hung in the door-way to invite Yuletide kisses. Hanging a sprig in the doorway goes back to the Druids, who called the herb 'all-heal' and considered it sacred. At the winter solstice, mistletoe (*Viscum album*) was cut from the sacred oak with a ritual knife and caught in a white cloth so that it did not touch the ground, Hung in a doorway, it protected the home from evil spirits during the darkest time of the year and created a sanctuary where a kiss of peace could be exchanged. In Victorian times, every kiss required the plucking of a white berry. When the berries were gone, lovers were out of luck.

Medicinally, mistletoe has been used to treat convulsions, hysteria, neuralgia, and heart conditions. Recent research suggests that European mistletoe may also inhibit the growth of tumors, making it possibly useful in cancer treatment. (Scientists say that the berries aren't poisonous, as once thought, but it's still not a good idea to eat them.)



Hellebores: Winter Standouts

The commonly known Lenten Rose, (*Helleborus orientalis*), is an outstanding four season perennial. It is also said to be hardier (Zones 4 to 9) and much easier to grow than its sister, *H. niger*, the Christmas rose. It has broader evergreen leaflets and saucer-shaped creamy-green flowers borne in large clusters that turn pinker with age. These blooms open in March and last in most cases until May. Some hybrids have blossoms gently spotted with tones of purple or maroon; others have larger flowers in shades of pink and red.

Treasured for their beauty, Hellebores have again returned to the limelight after years of being overlooked. Even if they never flowered, their leathery, deeply lobed leaves would add interest to any garden. But flower they do, producing luscious, subtly hued blooms from winter to spring, a time when almost nothing else is in bloom. Hellebores are easy to grow, will re-seed themselves, or can be divided and transplanted .

Care and Propagation

Remove any tattered, discolored foliage in early spring as the plant begins to bloom; topdress with well rotted manure. In early spring or late autumn you can divide mature plants. Dig them up and hose off the soil. Use a clean, sharp knife and leave at least two buds on every division. Re-plant, but be patient, as they resent being disturbed and might not bloom the first year after surgery.

Planting Partners

Hellebores are best planted with spring bulbs particularly early narcissus and tulips. Other well-matched perennials include wild flowers, ferns, primroses, pulmonarias, hostas and foam flowers.



Winter is Rough

No doubt about it, winter is rough on our skin. Winds blow, hands chap, lips crack, but your hands don't have to surrender to the elements. If you're singing the winter-time dry-skin blues, ease the roughness with either of these wonderful winter hand soothers.

Skin Smoother



In the top of a double boiler, heat 1/2 cup almond oil, 1 ounce beeswax, and 3 teaspoons cocoa butter. When the beeswax is melted, remove mixture from heat. Add 12 drops rose oil and 12 drops vitamin E oil. Mix thoroughly. Pour into small jars. Allow to cool and add lids. Keeps indefinitely.

Hand Mask

To smooth and soften extra-dry skin, try this honey-avocado mix. Mix together 1/3 cup fresh avocado and 1 teaspoon pure honey until smooth and creamy. Massage mixture into your hands, Let sit for 20 minutes, then rinse well with warm water. Store any leftover mask in the refrigerator. Makes 3 1/2 ounces.





**Chocoholics
Unite!**

(This page is for you!)

A Brownie For The Winter Blues

If a chocolate chip cookie makes you feel good, a brownie may be better to help fight the winter blues, says food-mood researcher Adam Drewnowski. He's a Ph.D., at the University of Washington. "Chocolate is a perfect blend of ingredients that stimulates feel-good endorphins and boosts calming serotonin," he says.

Chocolate also is filled with a brain chemical called phenylethylamine. It's the same chemical released when two people fall in love. Another bonus is that it contains theobromine and magnesium, which help increase brain function.

As for the caffeine in chocolate, there's about 6 milligrams per ounce, which may also give you a mental boost. Please bear in mind that a little chocolate goes a long way. That being said, also understand that there's no replacement for a well balanced diet that includes lots of fresh vegetables and fruit, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat products. Its also best to eat regularly throughout the day to maintain proper blood sugar levels. That is the ultimate mood regulator of all.

Creamy Caramel Brownies

- 1 cup finely chopped pecans
- 1 pkg. (18 oz.) Nestle Toll House Refrigerated Brownie Bar Dough, broken into squares
- 12 Nestle Creamy Caramel Treasures, unwrapped
- 1/2 cup Nestle Toll House Semi-Sweet Chocolate Morsels

PREHEAT oven to 325°F. Grease or paper line 12 muffin cups. Place nuts in medium bowl. Press brownies into nuts, coating well. Place into prepared cups. Bake for 22 to 25 minutes or until edges are set. Remove pan to wire rack; gently press 1 unwrapped Treasure into each brownie. Cool completely; remove from pan.

MICROWAVE morsels in small, heavy-duty plastic bag on High (100%) power for 30 to 45 seconds; knead. Microwave at additional 10- to 20-second intervals, kneading until smooth. Cut tiny corner from bag; squeeze to drizzle over each brownie.

(Makes about 12 brownies)

Variations:

For German Chocolate Treasure Brownies:
Use Nestle Toasted Coconut Treasures
or

For Peanut Butter Treasure Brownies:
Use Nestle Peanut Butter Treasures.



Healthy Houseplant



Hints

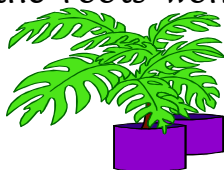
Houseplants are tougher than you think as long as you give them the right care. Try these tips to encourage your indoor plants to grow healthy and strong.

1. Put them in the right light. The majority of houseplants demand sun and more sun. If the tag the plant came with, or a houseplant resource guide, says "full sun," place them in a room with south facing windows where light flows in.

2. Turn, turn, and turn again. By simply giving your houseplants a half-turn every day, you'll encourage them to grow to an even height.

3. Don't freak them out. Houseplants don't handle sudden changes well. They'll drop leaves and buds, and become more susceptible to diseases and pests. Introduce changes gradually: Instead of moving them around every day, let them stay in one place and monitor their growth. If they look droopy and don't perk up after you water or fertilize them, you should try them in a new situation.

4. Repot whenever the container looks too small. Otherwise, the flowers and foliage may look nice, but the roots won't have room to grow.



5. Soak the plant when soil is dried out. Place the plant's container in the sink or in a pail with the water slightly higher than the top of the container. Remove the container when bubbles no longer come to the surface. Then let the plant drain.



6. Fertilize regularly. The best time to fertilize is during the growing season, usually March through September.

Gardener Gatherings

Places to Go & Things to Learn



What & Where
"Great Greens 2003"
Matthaei Botanical Gardens
December 13, 10 am - 12 pm
Create your own small-space tree using fresh cut greens on a 42" topiary stand that's yours to keep and reuse as you please in any season.
Registration fee: \$40 non-member
\$35 member
Deadline for registration is December 6
call 734-998-7061