

Reno County Extension

December 2016



K-State Research & Extension - Reno County 2 W 10th Ave South Hutchinson KS 67505

In This Issue:

- Page 2 Central Kansas Ag Showcase and Job Fair
Kansas Cattle Drive
- Page 3 Kansas Cattle Drive
- Page 4 Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) and Beef Herd Health
- Page 5 It's Cookie Time!
Clean the Fridge for the Holidays
An Egg a Day May Reduce Risk of Strokes
- Page 6 Radon Test Kits
Storing Holiday Leftovers
- Page 7 Technology Help
Winter Weather Safety – Being Prepared is Important!
- Page 8 Plan a Community Clean-up Campaign Now
Apps of Note
2017 Waste Tire Grants
- Page 9 Master Gardener Congratulations!
Winter Bird Feeding
- Page 10 Winter Bird Feeding Continued
- Page 11 Care of Christmas and Thanksgiving Cacti
Poinsettia History
- Page 12 Poinsettia History Continued
Choosing and Caring for Your Christmas Tree
- Page 13 What to Do With the Christmas Tree
After Christmas
Storing Power Equipment for the Winter



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"K-State Research and Extension is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision or hearing disability, or a dietary restriction please contact Jan Steen by phone at (620) 662-2371 or by email at jmsteen@ksu.edu."

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**Ag Agent
Darren
Busick**

Central Kansas Ag Showcase And Job Fair

This event was created for the many facets in the Central Kansas Ag community. The first being to promote awareness of agribusiness in Central Kansas. While showcasing businesses and services there will be a great opportunity for networking. This event is also designed to educate the public about the agribusiness industry in this region as well as provide an outlet for businesses to feature current and future job openings. The general public is invited and farmers/ranchers, and students from the area are highly encouraged to attend. There will be booth spaces available, as well as a stage for companies to talk about their product or services on a first come, first served basis. We have divided the Ag industry into 18 areas Technology, Education, Finance, Manufacturing, etc., and we plan on offering tours to multiple sites within some of these categories. Should you be interested in being a tour site, please contact us via the information listed below. The Central Kansas Ag Showcase and job fair will be held on Friday March 24th, 2017 at Memorial Hall in Hutchinson. Booth spaces will cost \$25.00 for a 10X10 foot space to cover the transportation for the tours and facilities. If interested in a booth, please RSVP by March 20th.

Kansas Cattle Drive

The Kansas Cattle Drive was started so that ranchers, K-State Research and Extension, the agriculture industry, FFA, and general public can all come together and learn what's happening in the beef industry across the Midwest. We are hosting ranches from across Kansas on Main Street in Buhler, KS on Saturday Febru-

ary 18th. These ranches will bring a representation of their herds to showcase in portable catch pens near the high school. There will be plenty to do inside or out regardless of temperature. You can visit the growing trade show while listening to live music. We will also have speakers on three different stages this year. We will have Chef Alli and Debbie Lyons-Blythe doing a cooking demonstration while talking about life on the ranch. Justin Talley will be presenting on pests and control in beef. KC Olson will be presenting on fall burning of native pastures to control sericea lespedeza. Montana Stockman Curt Pate will join us this year. For more than a decade, Curt Pate has conducted demonstrations and clinics on stockmanship, colt starting and ranch horsemanship throughout North America and Europe. A nationally recognized stockmanship instructor, Pate teaches techniques on how to put the proper pressure on cattle at a different angle and at varying amounts to help move them comfortably and without a negative experience – for the stockman or the livestock. Curt will be in the Kansas Cattle Drive's new Demo Arena twice throughout the day. One demo will be called Horsemanship for Stockmanship and the last will be Cattle Handling on Foot. If you have kids, or are just a kid at heart, come visit the FFA Fun Zone where there will be plenty to do for all ages. Come get your picture with Willie the Wildcat from 11:00am to 1:00pm. Also, plan on eating at the food trucks parked just south of the high school or go to downtown Buhler and visit all the shopping and dining attractions the small town is packed with. We have a great line up of these speakers and more throughout the day - you won't want to miss it!

Join us for the 2017



- * Live Entertainment
- * New Vendors

- * New Speakers
- * Demo Arena



facebook.com/kansascattledrive

K-STATE

Research and Extension

Contact us for more information:

(620) 662-2371 or via email at: darrenbusick@ksu.edu

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Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) and Beef Herd Health

**Wednesday, December 14, 2016
12:00 – 2:00 PM**

**South Hutchinson Community Building
101 W Ave C, South Hutchinson**

Complimentary meal upon arrival

**RSVP for the meal by 12/09/16
Call 620-662-2371 or email Darren at darrenbusick@ksu.edu**

Special thanks to Dr Hanzlicek for sponsoring lunch

Topics

- Understanding the VFD and changes in access to feed grade antibiotics
 - Understanding Anaplasmosis
 - Understanding Johne's

Presenter

**Dr. Gregg Hanzlicek, DVM & PhD
KSU College of Veterinary Medicine**

Brought to you by Reno County Extension

GET THE *FACTS* FROM JENNIFER SCHROEDER, Family & Consumer Science Agent

It's Cookie Time!

The holidays bring the joy of time with family and friends! One tradition is making cookies to share. With recent recalls of contaminated flour, it is important to handle cookie dough safely to not spoil holiday fun.



Many cookies are shaped with your hands. Resist the temptation to lick your fingers or sample the cookie dough! Risks from eating raw eggs and now uncooked flour, can increase your risk of getting a foodborne illness. Regardless of the brand or source of flour or eggs, the risk of foodborne illness is present when consumed raw.

Be sure hard surfaces to roll out cookie dough are clean and sanitized before and after dough has been in contact with the surface.

As always, wash your hands before and after handling cookie dough or any raw foods. Follow recipe instructions for baking cookies at proper temperatures and specified times.

For more information see:

www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm508450.htm www.cleaninginstitute.org/clean_living/surfaces.aspx

www.bestfoodfacts.org/raw-cookie-dough-fda-says-no/

Clean the Fridge for the Holidays

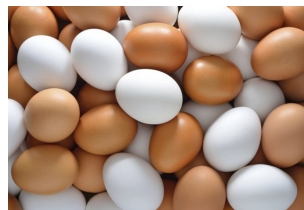
While November 15 is designated as "National Clean Your Fridge Day" day, this cleaning should happen often throughout the year.

Wipe up spills immediately, clean surfaces thoroughly with hot, soapy water; then rinse. Once a

week, make it a habit to throw out perishable foods that should no longer be eaten. Storage time for cooked leftovers is 4 days; raw poultry and ground meats, 1 to 2 days. Avoid using solvent cleaning agents, abrasives, and all cleansers that may impart taste to food or ice cubes, or cause damage to the interior finish of your refrigerator. For more information, go to "Refrigeration and Food Safety."



An Egg a Day May Reduce Risk of Strokes



Over the years, eggs have been scrutinized for their role in the human diet. Nutrition experts have gone back and forth about the daily consumption of eggs and cardiovascular health.

In a recent study published in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition, they report that dietary cholesterol, which includes one egg per day, is not a concern for strokes and coronary heart disease (CHD) risks.

In a review of research up to August 2015, the researchers looked at seven studies on egg intake and stroke and seven studies on egg intake and CHD. The meta-analysis showed a statistically significant 12% lower risk of stroke. There was no association of egg intake and CHD. Eggs are a low cost, nutrient dense food that can be beneficial in the every day diet. One egg is considered as one ounce-equivalent in the Protein Foods Group of the MyPlate guidelines.

Radon Test Kits

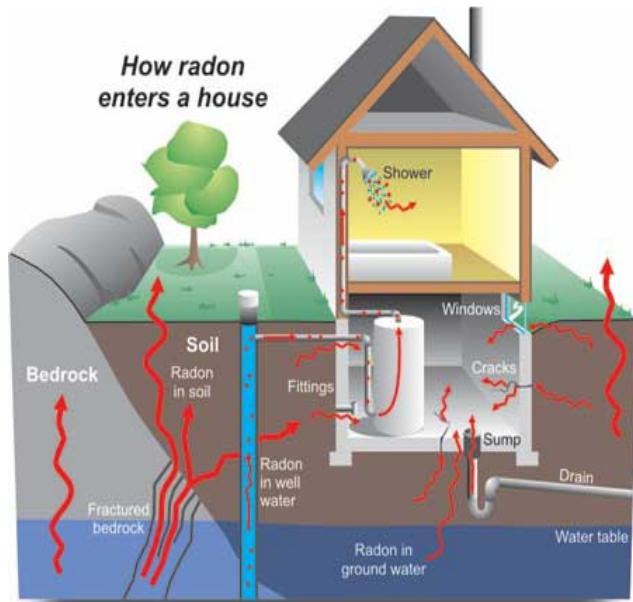


Diagram showing the various pathways by which radon can enter a home. Image courtesy of Natural Resources Canada www.geoscience.nrcan.gc.ca

January is both Kansas Radon Action Month and National Radon Action Month. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas released in rock, soil, and water from the natural decay of uranium. While levels in outdoor air pose a relatively low threat to human health, radon can accumulate to dangerous levels inside buildings. You can't see, smell, or taste it, but an elevated radon level in your home may be affecting the health of your family.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that all homes in the U.S. be tested for radon. Winter is an excellent time to test your home. Testing for radon is easy to do. If your house has a radon problem, you can take steps to fix it to protect yourself and your family. You can find out if your home has an elevated radon level by conducting a simple test. It's easy as opening a package, placing a radon detector in a designated area, and, after a set number of days, sending the detector back to a lab for analysis. The lab will then inform you of your radon test results.

Radon test kits are available at the Reno County Extension Office for \$6.60.



Storing Holiday Leftovers

Plastic food containers are great ways to save leftovers or other foods. But over time, plastic can warp, stain, or remain greasy.



Many types of plastic containers are available, but many are designed for one-time use only. This includes takeout containers and dairy food cartons.

For reusable containers, wash them with hot soapy water or on the top rack of your dishwasher. Use the low- or no-heat drying cycle in the dishwasher.

To remove stains, let the empty container sit in the direct sun a few hours. Or, soak in a mild bleach solution of 2 teaspoons plain bleach per gallon of water.

For smelly plastic containers, soak them in a solution of 1 teaspoon baking soda per cup water or fill with undiluted vinegar

For more tips, see www.cleaninginstitute.org/clean_living/plastic_food_containers.aspx



COMMUNITY

BITS AND BYTES WITH JAN STEEN

Technology Help

Don't forget that we're here to help you with your technology questions. Whether it be software, smartphone, tablet, laptop, social media, or anything in between our office can answer questions and provide information about many common – and sometimes not so common – technical issues. Give us a call at 620-662-2371 or send an email to jmsteen@ksu.edu.



Winter Weather Safety – Being Prepared is Important!

- ♦ Winter weather can be beautiful, it can be fun to play in, but it can also be dangerous if you're not prepared. Here are some important tips you can use to stay safe in the coming months.
- ♦ If going outdoors, let someone else know you are going and where you'll be. There are opportunities to get injured by slipping on ice, getting frostbite, or developing hypothermia. If another person knows you'll be outdoors and where you'll be, they can check on you from time to time to make sure you're safe.
- ♦ If you're traveling, tell the person you're visiting when you're leaving and what route you'll be taking. If you don't show up when expected, help can be sent along the route you took. Don't forget to take a cell phone and charger in case you need to call for help, or update the people at your destination on any delays.



- ♦ Carry a winter survival kit in your vehicle. It could save your life, and the lives of any passengers who may be with you at the time. A kit can contain:
 - A windshield scraper
 - Flashlight and extra batteries
 - Snack foods
 - Matches and small candles
 - Brightly colored cloth (used to signal others)
 - Dry clothing, including extra gloves and hats
 - A small supply of any medicines, including
 - Prescriptions
 - Blankets
 - A tow chain or tow rope
 - Salt, sand or cat litter to place under tires for
 - Traction
 - Jumper cables
 - Cell phone and charger
 - Water
 - If you keep your kit in your car during the whole season, be sure to keep bottles of water in a sealable bag. As water freezes it expands, so there's a change for bottles leaking.
- * If there is room, store your emergency kit in the passenger compartment of your vehicle for easy access. If your trunk is frozen shut, or jammed, you'll still be able to get to your supplies.
- * Make sure your vehicle's gas tank is full.
- * Never leave during bad weather with less than half a tank of gas.
- * Don't leave your vehicle if you get stranded.
- * A car or truck is a large object and will be easy to spot, especially if you are using your hazard flashers and have a brightly colored cloth or flag outside of the vehicle. If you leave the car, you have a chance of becoming

disoriented and lost. A car will block the wind and the snow or rain, so is the safest place to stay until being rescued.

Plan a Community Clean-up Campaign Now

The “Conducting a Community Clean-up/Fix-up Campaign” publication from K-State Research & Extension has been revised and can be found at <http://bit.ly/1HU7Bcq> (address is case sensitive). This time of a year is a perfect time to start planning a spring clean-up project so everything is ready by the actual day of the event.

Apps of Note

We will, from time to time, highlight different apps of interest – from Cooperative Extension sources, and from other sources when available. You can find these apps in your device’s app store by doing a search for the name in *italics*. The apps presented are for informational purposes and no recommendation for any specific product or service is implied.



MyFi Assist: This app is designed to be a personal financial assistant providing the ability to examine common financial situation such as loans, credit card payments, and savings. The user can personalize the results by converting them into something meaningful to them such as hours worked, average amount spent on eating out, or other items they might purchase or sell, such as head of calves, bales of hay, shoes, etc. Available for Android and iOS devices.

Cost: Free. From Utah State University Extension

USA.gov Apps: Not just one app, but many. USA.gov catalogues the apps from each federal agency and lists them by agency, topic, and operating system (Android, iOS, Win-



dows, Blackberry). If you’re looking for information from a specific department, this is the place to look: <http://www.usa.gov/mobile-apps>



Google Chrome: If you use Google Chrome as a browser on your desktop or laptop, you may be interested in installing Chrome on your mobile device, too. When you create bookmarks in Chrome, and you’re signed into the browser with your Google account, those bookmarks will also show up on your phone or tablet. Browsing history also shows up on other devices, so that recipe you were looking at online this weekend but forgot to save can quickly be brought up again while you’re at the grocery store so you can buy the needed ingredients.

2017 Waste Tire Grants

This grant supports the purchase of products made from recycled tires including playground cover, picnic tables and benches. The grant will be competitive and pay up to 50% of the cost of the products. The grant comes from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.



Applications due February 15, 2017.

VISIT http://www.kdheks.gov/waste/forms_grants.html

You will find the guides and applications under Waste Tire Grant Forms

Questions: Contact Megan MacPherson
megan.macpherson@ks.gov

785-296-1600 or 800-282-9790



GET GROWING with Pam Paulsen, Horticulture Agent

Horticulture

Master Gardener Congratulations!

We have a new crop of Master Gardeners. This group completed the training in the fall of 2015 and 40 hours of volunteer service in 2016 to become full-fledged Reno County Extension Master Gardeners. Congratulations to the 2016 class:

Debbie Bougher
Amy Calhoun
Kay Deaver
Julia Hulsey
Miriam Iwashige
Doris McClure
Jim Potter
Tina Saylor
Gail Stephenson

We also have a new group of Master Gardener trainees who have just recently completed the Master Gardener training course and will be performing their volunteer hours during the 2017 growing season. Our newest group of Reno County Extension Master Gardener Trainees are:

Paula Cunningham
Linda Frazier
Glenda Holdaway
Erin Kooiman
Christina Kraemer
Kathy Petz
Pablo Quinonez
Jacob Terrell
Pamela Ullum
Jacqui Wood

In 2016, Reno County Extension Master Gardeners contributed over 1500 hours of volunteer service to the community. Their activities included helping with 4-H activities in horticulture and at the Reno County and Kansas State Fairs, working with Hutchinson Correctional Facility inmates on a community garden, hosting a Youth Lawnmower Safety Clinic, maintaining demonstration gardens on the Hutchinson Community College campus and at the Reno County Extension Office, hosting a number of community

education programs throughout the year, providing a monthly educational booth at the Reno County Farmers' Market and contributing gardening articles to their blog at www.digthisrenocounty.com. The RCEMG members also hosted their 8th annual garden tour and are already working hard at planning for next year's tour. Be sure to mark your calendars for Saturday, June 10 for the 2017 garden tour.

Winter Bird Feeding

Winter weather is not only hard on people but can be a life and death struggle for birds.

Though birds require water and shelter, food is often



the resource most lacking during cold weather. Many different bird food mixes are available because various species often prefer different grains. One seed that has more universal appeal than any other: Black Oil Sunflower. If you are new to the bird-feeding game, make sure there is a high percentage of this seed in your mix. White Proso Millet is second in popularity and is the favorite of many ground feeding birds. Some commercially available seed mixes contain red millet, oats and other "fillers" that are not attractive to most backyard birds and can lead to waste as they get discarded in favor of other types of seeds.

Below is a guide to which seeds are likely to attract which bird species:

Black Oil Sunflower

There are two types of sunflower seeds available as bird feed – black oil and striped. The black oil has very thin shells and is easy for most seed-eating birds to crack open. They have a high fat content, which is needed in the winter. Striped sunflower seeds

have a much thicker shell and are harder for many birds to open. The discarded shells can create a mess under the feeder, which will need to be raked up on occasion. Shelled sunflowers are available but can be costly. Without the shell, sunflower hearts and chips can spoil quickly and can develop bacteria that is harmful to birds so they should be put out only in small amounts that can be consumed in one or two days.

Preferred by: Chickadees, Titmice, Nuthatches, Finches, Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Sparrows, Jays, Woodpeckers, Orioles, Tanagers, Doves

White Proso Millet

This is a favorite of a wide variety of bird species and many ground feeding birds including native American Sparrows, Mourning Doves, Towhees and Juncos. Many ground feeding birds will not eat from a raised feeder at all so it is a good idea to scatter White Proso Millet and other seed varieties on the ground or on a large raised area such as a picnic table.

Preferred by: Finches, Sparrows, Doves, Towhees, Juncos

Safflower

Safflower has a thick shell so some smaller birds have a hard time cracking these seeds open but it is a favorite food among Cardinals.

Preferred by: Chickadees, Titmice, Nuthatches, Finches, Cardinals, Grosbeaks

Nyger Thistle

These tiny, black seeds are rich in oils and provide valuable energy for the birds. Although it has thistle in its name, it is not related to the weedy, invasive thistles.

Preferred by: Finches, Pine Siskins, Juncos

Shelled and Cracked Corn

Corn tends to attract a number of larger birds, including those that may not be wanted at the feeder, including crows, ravens, and starlings as well as other wildlife such as squirrels and raccoons. The other problem with corn is that it can be contaminated with aflatoxins, which even at low levels can be extremely toxic to birds. If you choose to feed corn, make sure it is stored where it will stay dry and do not store in plastic bags. Corn should be fed in small amounts that will be consumed in one day, especially in wet weather.

Old corn should be raked up and discarded.

Preferred by: Blackbirds, Jays, Pigeons, Doves

Peanuts

Like corn, peanuts tend to attract other wildlife and can harbor aflatoxins, so it must be kept dry and used up fairly quickly.

Preferred by: Crows, Jays, Chickadees, Titmice, Woodpeckers

Some birds eat insects and fruit instead of seeds so you probably will not seed them at your feeders unless provide the food they prefer. To attract fruit eating birds you can soften raisins, currants or other dried berries by soaking them in water overnight and then putting them on a shallow plate placed on a raised platform or table feeder. Some birds such as tanagers and orioles enjoy sliced fresh fruit such as apples and oranges.

Preferred by: Robins, Waxwings, Bluebirds, Mockingbirds, Thrushes, Catbirds, Orioles, Tanagers

Insect eating birds can be attracted by placing dried mealworms and suet in the feeders. You can purchase pre-made suet cakes or make your own using beef suet available at most supermarket meat departments. Place suet cakes in their own feeders away from other feeders so it won't contaminate other feed if temperatures get too warm. Suet can easily get rancid if temperatures get too warm so it's best to provide it only in winter months.

Preferred by: Woodpeckers, Wrens, Chickadees, Nuthatches, Titmice

Providing a variety of feeders with a mix of seeds will attract the most diversity to your yard as different bird species have differing preferences where to feed. Some are ground feeders so seed can be sprinkled on the ground or placed in feeding trays or platforms. Other birds prefer elevated feeders such as hopper feeders and tube feeders. If possible, feeders should be placed near natural shelter such as trees and shrubs, especially evergreens as they provide the best cover from the elements and predators. If cats or squirrels are problems at the feeders, locating them 10 feet away from cover will still provide access to cover for the birds but will lessen other problems. For ground feeding birds, placing a large,

loosely stacked brush pile near the feed will give them some protection.

Be sure to clean feeders at least every two weeks. They should be cleaned more often during heavy use and wet weather. Scrubbing with a sturdy brush is usually sufficient but if seed has gone bad, it is a good idea to wash feeders with soap and water and dry thoroughly before adding more refilling.

Extended cold periods can also make water unavailable. A heated birdbath can be a tremendous draw for birds during times when all other water is frozen. Energy use is usually less than what most people expect, especially if the heater has a built-in thermostat. If a heater is not used, be sure to replace frozen water with fresh water at least a couple times during the day,

If you would like more information backyard bird feeding and bird watching, Chuck Otte, Agriculture Extension Agent for Geary County has a series of backyard birding guides at <http://gearycountyextension.com/NRMW.htm>

Care of Christmas and Thanksgiving Cacti



Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) are epiphytes native to the jungles of South America. Epiphytic plants grow on other plants and use them for support but not for nutrients. Though these cacti are different species, they will hybridize and produce varying stem shapes. Christmas cactus normally has smooth stem segments, and Thanksgiving Cactus has hook-like appendages on each segment.

Both of these cacti prefer bright indirect light. Too much sun can result in the leaves turning yellow. Common household temperatures are fine. Soil should be kept constantly moist but not waterlogged. Give them a light fertilization every other week. Blooming will normally cease in late winter to early spring, but continue to keep them moist and fertilized until fall. During the fall, stop fertilizing, and give the plants only enough water so the stems do not shrivel in order to encourage flower bud formation. Though these plants seem to flower best if kept a little pot bound, flowers will diminish if they are too crowded. If you haven't repotted in several years, or if you notice a decrease in flowering from the previous year, move the plant to a larger pot in the spring. If possible, move the plants outside for the summer. Choose a shady spot because these plants will not tolerate full sun. Leave the plants outside until frost threatens.

Normally, the plants will have received enough cool nights in the 50- to 55-degree range that flower buds will have formed. However, if they haven't, subjecting the plants to nights greater than 12 hours long and temperatures between 59 and 69 degrees can also generate flowers. Twenty-five consecutive long nights is enough for flower initiation. Place the plants in an unused room or cover them with a dark cloth or cardboard box to insure that they receive uninterrupted darkness. After the flower buds have formed, it takes an additional nine to 10 weeks for flowers to complete development and bloom.

Poinsettia History

Poinsettia plants certainly are jolly, aren't they? Their bright red bracts (modified leaves) are so bright and colorful that they've become an integral part of the holiday season. In fact, Franciscan monks who settled near the native habitat (Taxco, Mexico) of *Euphorbia pulcherrima* first used them in nativity processions in the 17th century. There, they are very large deciduous shrubs, reaching up to 15 feet in height. It wasn't until 1825 that poinsettias were introduced to the U.S. market. Joel Poin-



sett, a skilled botanist who happened to be the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, brought plants back to his home in Greenville, South Carolina and shared them with botanical gardens and horticultural friends. The rest is history.

In 1902 Albert Ecke, an immigrant from Germany, began a cut-flower business in California. Soon (1909ish) he started to specialize in poinsettias and the company has since become world renowned as expert in poinsettia production. They are a generous company, producing numerous books and guides for growing poinsettias. Because they are willing to share their knowledge and production tools, they have become the go-to supplier for poinsettia cuttings around the world.

In a nutshell, growing a poinsettia crop is a complex task. Stock plants, from which un-rooted cuttings are collected, are housed at huge greenhouse operations in Mexico and Central America. They are then delivered to local growers in the U.S. within 48 hours. In July. That's right, your beautiful Christmas poinsettia started production about five months ago. They're picky, too. If the humidity, light, temperature, and nutrition aren't just right, you get sick or strange-looking plants. No one will buy a sick or strange-looking poinsettia!

Did you know that poinsettia plants didn't really become popular until about 25 years ago? It's true. Until 1963, poinsettias were only grown as cut flowers but new breeding resulted in potted plant production in 1964. Soon, new colors (other than red) were released into the market (seven in 1968). Improved durability and long shelf-life were also important breeding considerations. In the early 1990s, novelty cultivars began to take off in popularity. Now Paul Ecke Ranch, Inc., offers over 65 different cultivars of poinsettia cuttings for the retail market with an additional varieties available to growers for trial only. While red is by far the most preferred poinsettia color, there are so many to choose from that you should definitely try at least one new one each year.

Don't worry about cats and dogs (and children, for that matter) being poisoned if they eat a poinsettia—chalk that one up to urban legend—the worst that could happen is some mild irritation.

As a last note, toss your poinsettia on the compost pile after the holidays with no guilt. They are far too persnickety to keep alive and color up again next year (not to say that it can't be done... just know that it's not easy to do!). If they are ex-

posed to temperatures 50 °F or below, they get cold damage (keep them in sleeves when getting in and out of the car). Too much heat can cause them to decline as well. The list goes on and on. For more information about poinsettia care, check out urbanext.illinois.edu/poinsettia.

Choosing and Caring for Your Christmas Tree

If selecting a cut tree, watch for these signs that the tree is too far gone.

- Needles are a dull, grayish-green color
- Needles fail to ooze pitch when broken apart and squeezed
- Needles feel stiff and brittle
- Needles pull easily off tree

Once you have your tree home, recut the trunk about one inch above the original cut. This will open up clogged, water-

conducting tissues.

Immediately place the trunk in warm water. Locate the tree in as cool a spot as possible. Avoid areas near fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, heat ducts and television sets as the heat will result in excess water loss. Make sure the reservoir stays filled. If the reservoir loses enough water that the bottom of the trunk is exposed, the trunk will need to be recut. Adding aspirins, copper pennies, soda pop, sugar and bleach to the water reservoir have not been shown to prolong the life of a tree.

If you choose a living Christmas tree, be sure to dig the planting hole before the ground freezes. Mulch the hole and backfill soil to keep them from freezing. Live trees should not be kept inside for more than three days. Longer periods may cause them to lose dormancy resulting in severe injury when planted outside. You may wish to tag the tree at the nursery and then pick it up a couple days before Christmas. After Christmas, move the tree to an unheated garage for several days to acclimatize it to outside temperatures. After planting, water well and leave some mulch in place to prevent the soil water from freezing and becoming unavailable for plant uptake.



What to Do With the Christmas Tree After Christmas

After the holidays, many municipalities allow old Christmas trees to be placed curbside. Trees are then collected and ground up for mulch or burned. If you miss the designated date, or your trash collector doesn't accept trees, there are several options to prolong the useful life of the tree.

An old Christmas tree can be used to benefit birds, fish, and the landscape by placing it in a corner of your deck, and spreading some birdseed nearby, or tying it to a deciduous tree or post near a bird feeder. The birds benefit from having escape cover nearby when hawks or cats threaten, and the dense boughs reduce the wind-chill on a cold night.

Sinking your Christmas tree in a pond is an easy way to improve fish habitat and fishing. The tree serves as little coral reef, in that the branches provide substrate for water plants to grow, and cover for minnows and other forms of small aquatic life. Larger fish are drawn by the shade and the presence of prey. How do you sink a tree? Tie the base to a cinder block with a short, stout rope, and toss it in. Just be sure to get permission from the pond owner first! Using the little tree around the landscape requires clipping off all of the branches. Use the boughs to add extra insulation around semi-hardy perennials or to trees and shrubs that were recently planted. The leftover trunk may be used as a garden stake next spring.

Or cut and let it dry for a few weeks, and you will have some easy lighting firewood. Just beware that most conifer species tend to spark and pop more than hardwoods, as resin pockets in the

wood make tiny explosions. This can delight the youngsters, but for safety's sake, keep an eye on the fire when burning Christmas tree logs!

Storing Power Equipment for the Winter



Late fall or early winter is a good time to service power equipment such as mowers, tillers and garden tractors. Run the equipment out of gas or treat the existing gas with a

stabilizer as untreated gas can deteriorate over time. If using a stabilizer, run the engine long enough for untreated gas in the carburetor bowl to be burned and replaced. This is also a good time to replace the oil (and filter, if present) since the engine is warm. Check and replace the spark plug if necessary. Some gardeners will also apply a light, sprayable oil into the cylinder through the spark plug hole. Check and clean air filters and replace if necessary.

Many mowers and tillers will have a foam pre filter that can become filthy with use. If allowed to become too dirty, engines will run poorly or may not run at all. Sharpen blades, clean tines, tighten screws, replace broken parts and do all the other things needed to keep equipment in good shape. Though such maintenance takes some time and effort, it pays for itself by reducing frustration and lost time due to poorly performing equipment during a hectic spring.



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