

January 2012



## *Care of Holiday Plants* By Willie Chance

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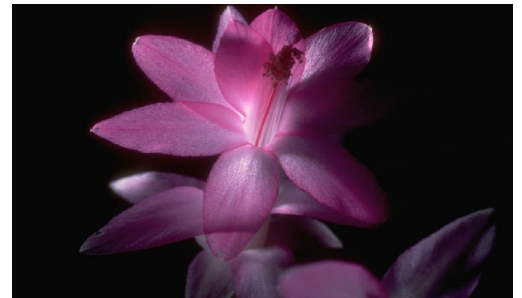
Live Holiday gift plants require care to bloom and maintain health.



**Poinsettias** need a daytime temperature of 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Reduce this to low 60's at night. Put poinsettias in bright light but never in full sun. Select areas where the plant will not dry out. If placed in a window, remove it at night so it will not get too cold. Let the soil surface dry slightly between waterings and then water until it runs out of the bottom of the pot. Poinsettias are very sensitive to environmental changes. Drafts, cold, heat, dim light, low humidity or improper watering may cause these plants to wilt or shed leaves and flowers.



**Amaryllis** require bright light, cool conditions and moist soils like other flowering plants. Bulbs bloom four to six weeks after planting. Individual flowers last three to four days but a plant may have two flower stalks with three to four flowers per stalk. To re-bloom an amaryllis, let the leaves grow normally in a well-lit warm location. Put them outside in the spring and summer. Fertilize and water as needed. Once leaves begin to die back, slowly and eventually stop watering. Store the bulb in a cool, dry place for four to eight weeks before beginning growth again by watering.



**Holiday Cacti** come in three types which bloom at different times of the year. Depending on type, they flower at Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter. All three require bright light, well-drained soils and moderate moisture levels. South facing windows are good places for holiday cacti. After bloom, remove faded flowers and fertilize.

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## Care of Holiday Plants (continued from page 1)

They can be grown outside in spring and summer in shady locations. Stem pieces of three segments or more root easily. Holiday cacti flower based on day length and temperature so they should bloom at the same time every year. Strong artificial lighting and high temperatures can delay or prevent bloom. You may need to restrict very bright artificial lights at

night during the time of blossom development (September and October for Thanksgiving and Christmas Cacti or February and March for Easter Cacti). Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti need 12 to 14 hours of uninterrupted dark during the night for about six weeks to develop blooms. During bloom development keep temperatures cool - 55 to 65 degrees at night and 5 to 10 degrees

higher in the day. Keep the plants slightly on the dry side. Return slowly to normal watering after flower buds develop. Sudden changes in environment may cause the plant to shed flower buds.

*Willie Chance is a retired Cooperative Extension Agent from Houston County.*

## My New Year's Wishes for your garden by Kim Sutherland

I wish you more good bugs and fewer bad bugs. Hooray for ladybugs, praying mantids, and lacewings. Kudzu bugs, aphids, squash vine borers and pickleworms, please go away. No more cedar-apple rust, black knot, or, "apple tree ick" (a.k.a. fire blight) this year.



I wish that we can all gain a better understanding of organic fertilizer and pest control and use them effectively, thus having less of a reliance on environmentally harmful chemicals.

I wish birds and squirrels would eat what we didn't want to eat ourselves, like acorns, bugs and weed seeds. Armadillos go home! You are making a mess with your incessant digging and when you don't make it across the road. . .

I hope that this year brings a contin-

ued interest in our beautiful (and appropriate) native plants and gardeners learn which non-native invasives they should never plant or encourage. No more English ivy, liriope, Japanese honeysuckle, mahonia, nandina, bamboo and privet. My garden has every one of them and it is a constant battle.

Water, water, water. I wish all of us a wetter year with exactly one inch of water per week all through the growing season. I am tired of buying plants or starting them from seed just to watch them shrivel up and die no matter how much I water them.



I wish you a continuous supply of compost and mulch...because there never seems to be enough, ever! It would be great if it just appeared where it is needed as well, saving us hours of shoveling and raking.

I wish you beautiful nutritious vegetables that don't bolt before their time or get chewed by insects, deer, or birds the day before you intended to harvest them.



I wish you a garden filled with butterflies, hummingbirds and lots more bees. We need to help our pollinators so that they can return the favor and help us.

I wish you seeds that germinate, plants that grow, flowers that are beautiful...or at least turn into something edible.

I wish everyone health, happiness, good fortune and a garden filled with beauty, peace and healthy delicious food this year.

*Kim Sutherland is a Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteer*

## *Lullaby to My Garden* by Helen Wenner

Close your eyes, go to sleep, sweet dreams, dear garden. I have raked out all the old foliage, tilled your soil, and covered you gently with a blanket of Austrian winter peas. When you awaken next spring, their “green manure” will provide fresh, organic nitrogen for the hungry babies I plant.



Thank you so much for the best year ever. In spite of wanton attacks by deer, squash bugs, kudzu beetles...in spite of heat and drought... you managed to produce a harvest worthy of a Master Garden. Your Better Boy tomatoes (my pride and joy) were prolific and delicious all season long. Our friends were all grateful, and we will still be eating canned or frozen ‘maters for months to come.



Your butternut squash vine survived the sap-sucking bugs to fill a wheelbarrow with 50 or so of its fruits. They are currently lining the bookcase shelves in our unhappy daughter’s bedroom. She will learn to love squash someday.

Your Beauregard sweet potatoes became a legend in the community for their size, number, and flavor, filling the barn loft and lining the jerry-built shelving in our basement. Had there been a shortage of footballs this fall, we could have donated a truckload to the high schools and colleges.



I am glad I planted only four Savoy cabbage plants this year, as each one grew into a weighty, compact globe with a fifteen-inch diameter. Harvesting those tasty beauties was a bit of a chore, but the chiropractor says the pulled muscles in my back will heal with time and rest. The minestrone and cole slaw, however, has been delicious. Ad nauseam.

Thank goodness for all the turnips too, and thank goodness their season is over since the crisper in the refrigerator is burst-

ing and our friends apparently don’t care for turnips as much as they do sweet potatoes. Disguising them in the mashed potatoes is helping the pile dwindle a bit though. Our daughter hasn’t really complained because they are not squash.



I thought we and our neighbors had our fill of turnip greens, but then you went into high gear again with the collards, with which we are still blessed. I am sure we are healthier for all the vitamins and antioxidants in these dark green veggies, but exactly how many of them did you think we could prepare and still have a life outside the kitchen? Friends have now stopped visiting us for fear we’ll load up their cars with produce. So, enough already. You’ve earned your Master Garden badge, now GO TO SLEEP!

*Helen Wenner is a Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteer*

## Native Grasses for the Birds by Stacy Smith

You wouldn't think that Mother Nature would ever have to call on a master gardener for help with her "yard," but sometimes a volunteer is just what she needs. On November 5th, my family and I headed down to Southwest Georgia near the small town of Butler to help collect the native grass seed needed to help restore sandhill habitat in some Important Birding Areas (IBAs). Important Birding Areas are key breeding and feeding sites important for bird conservation. The IBA program, part of the Partners in Flight program, works to identify, restore, and manage these crucial areas.



Grassland is a habitat that is especially in need of conservation. Over the last century, grassland birds have shown the strongest decline of any group of birds as native grasslands are lost to development and fire suppression. Grasslands in Georgia are especially important to grasshopper sparrows, eastern meadowlarks, bachman's sparrow, loggerhead shrikes and migratory sandhill cranes and wintering sparrows and raptors. This volunteer opportunity was focused on the grasses that grow in the Sandhills of Georgia. This habitat is the ancient remnant of ancient beaches that existed back when Flor-

ida and the Southern half of Georgia were part of the ocean floor. It is characterized by deep, sandy soils and the plants and animals that thrive in this environment.



Volunteers met at the Fall Line Sandhill Wildlife Management Area which is a recent acquisition of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). From the information kiosk the area looks a little barren, like the old timberland it is; but the area was purchased because of the high diversity of rare plants and animals found on the 876 acres. The area had been managed for timber and pulpwood production. However, the planted loblolly and sand pines did not do well on the dry, sandy soils and the native vegetation and plants were able to persist. The list of rare and threatened animals and plants found in the area includes Southeastern kestrels (a type of falcon), Bachman's sparrows, gopher tortoises, southern hognose snakes, gopher frogs, striped newts, federally endangered pondberry, sandhill golden-aster, Pickering's morning-glory, and lax water-milfoil.

Our first order of business was to find an unmowed roadside harboring Yellow Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), our first target species. This grass is a bunching grass that grows

three to eight feet tall. The ripe seed-heads were impressively fat and I could see how it could be important food to many small animals. We even had a go at tasting it ourselves as the DNR biologist leading us showed us how it crunched when ready. Our family was issued a burlap sack and worked until lunch stripping plume after plume of the fluffy seeds.



After lunch, a much smaller group of us moved on to the Black Creek Natural Area. If you've never visited a sandhill, let me recommend this beautiful little natural area, especially in the fall when the scrubby turkey oaks (*Quercus laevis*) are flushed red and the beautiful Coastal Plain Balm (*Dicerandra linearifolia*) fills the air with a lovely minty smell every time you walk through a patch of it.



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## Native Grasses for the Birds *(continued from page 4)*

The grass seed we were targeting in this section was Lop-sided Indian Grass. We wandered through the sandhill searching for patches of the distinctive long-awned grass. The day was beautiful and the kids had a great time digging and harvesting seed.



This is a volunteer opportunity that shows up regularly, so watch the Georgia Important Birding Areas Website (<http://www.atlantaudubon.org/iba/>) for it next fall. You'll have a great time for a good cause and learn a lot about the native flora of a really interesting and unique habitat. You might even be inspired, as I have been with my grassland experiences, to start a little prairie area of native grasses for the birds in your backyard. I consider it a rest stop as they make their way to the Important Birding Areas my family and I helped to care for.

References:

<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/node/1262>

<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/node/1259>



*Stacy Smith is a Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteer*

## Growing Tea in Georgia *by Amanda Tedrow*

**I am interested in growing my own tea. Is it possible to grow a tea plant in Athens? Ann S. Bishop**



White, green and black teas are all made from *Camellia sinensis* or Tea Camellia. This camellia is hardy in Athens and is a very attractive evergreen shrub. There is even a large beautiful multi-trunk specimen at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in the Shade

Garden. This plant is grown as an ornamental and is approximately twelve to fifteen feet tall and flowers each year.

*Camellia sinensis* is native to Asia but is now grown around the world. Plants which are used for harvest are typically pruned to about four to six feet tall for ease of harvest. White, green and black tea utilizes the young leaves and leaf buds of the plant. These leaves are collected every couple of weeks during the active growing season and contain about 4% caffeine. Older leaves are also collected but are used for other types of tea.

For green tea, leaves are steamed or roasted briefly then dried in an oven.

For white tea, leaves are briefly dried in the sun, brought inside and stirred

hourly then dried in the oven.

For black tea, leaves are rolled and crushed until they begin to turn red. They are then air dried for a few days and then dried in the oven.

Wait until your plant is over three years old before you begin harvesting, otherwise the plant may not be able to handle the constant stress of harvesting.



## *Gardening Events in Our Area*

**Native Plant Symposium**, Wednesday, January 18, 2012, 8:45 am - 3:30 pm, State Botanical Garden, The Garden Club of Georgia Terrace Room. members \$55, To register call 706-524-6156 or [www.botgarden.uga.edu](http://www.botgarden.uga.edu)

**Greenlife Expo**, Classic Center, January 28, 2012, 9-5pm, free! [www.greenlifeathens.com](http://www.greenlifeathens.com)

**Preparing for Your Spring Garden**, Winterville Depot, February 22, 2012, 10-11:30am, \$1, Call Jaime at the Council on Aging for more information 706-549-4850 x2043

**Georgia Organics annual conference**, Columbus, GA, February 24-25, 2012, <http://georgiaorganics.org/conference.aspx>

**Nutrition Education Coalition of Northeast Georgia annual conference**, Oconee County Civic Center, February 21, 2012, \$15 <http://nutritioncoalitionnega.org/conference/>

**Winter Tree Identification**, State Botanical Garden of Georgia, January 21, 2012, 8:30-12:30pm, \$50, To register call 706-524-6156 or [www.botgarden.uga.edu](http://www.botgarden.uga.edu)



**You can bury a lot of troubles digging in the dirt. ~Author Unknown**



## *Amanda Says*

Happy New Year, I hope this year will be one full of gardening happiness and learning for you!

As we start this year I am excited about all the new beginnings. We are starting the Master Gardener and Master Composter classes this month and all the students are excited about learning. This excitement is always contagious and really gets me through the winter!

With this unseasonably warm weather we've been having I am trying to get used to working in the yard during December and January (when my landscape is usually pretty dormant). While I'm not surprised by bulbs like daffodils blooming early I was caught off guard to see bearded irises blooming at my office already!

Something to keep in mind with

this weather is to nurture your plants. They are confused by this weather and if they bloom early or start leafing out (like some crepe myrtles I've seen around town) they may become stressed. With the coming cold weather flowers and leaves which are out of season will get nipped with the next freeze. Make sure all your plants are mulched to keep their roots happy and watch the above ground portions to see if any pruning is needed.

Happy Gardening!

**Gardening is a matter of your enthusiasm holding up until your back gets used to it. ~Author Unknown**

## *Outdoor Water Restrictions: Clarke, Barrow, Oconee & Jackson Counties*

Outdoor water use for Clarke, Barrow, Oconee, and Jackson Counties is now limited to one day per week with even number addresses allowed to water on Saturday and odd number addresses allowed to water on Sunday. The ban on watering between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM remains in effect on Saturdays and Sundays.

THE FOLLOWING USES ARE EXEMPT FROM ALL HOURLY AND DAY OF THE WEEK RESTRICTIONS.

- Drip Irrigation
- Soaker Hoses
- Hand Watering
- Food Gardens
- New installations of plants and turf (with a permit)
- Grey Water, Rainwater and AC Condensation Reuse
- Golf Course- Tee and Green Irrigation
- Plants for sale, resale, or installation

For more information and additional exemptions please see the following link:

<http://athensclarkecounty.com/index.aspx?NID=1243>



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