

Henderson County Master Gardener

“THE INSIDE DIRT”

It's Christmas Tree Time

Karen Bassett

If you want a live tree this year, and if you'd like to cut your own tree, there are over 150 tree farms in the state of Texas from which to choose. Some tree farms in the area are: Broken Z Tree Farm and Howdy Acres Christmas Tree Farm in Athens, Texas; Watson Tree Farm in Tyler, Texas and Trail Creek Farm in Lindale, Texas.

If you purchase a living Christmas tree to enjoy for more than one holiday season you can purchase a tree in a container; have it in your home during the holiday season; and then plant it in your landscape when the holidays have ended. Some coniferous evergreen trees that are suitable for this purpose are: juniper, deodar cedar or Aleppo pine; you might also purchase a broad-leaved evergreen such as Buford holly or yaupon holly. When planting the tree in your landscape, be sure to keep in mind basic landscaping principles, such as the amount of sunlight needed for growth, the soil type, available irrigation, as well as the size the plant will be at maturity. When planting the tree, also remember the hole dug for the tree should be no deeper than the container, and twice as wide. Place the tree in the hole, backfill, water, and finish backfilling. The tree must be watered on a regular basis, and should be fertilized in the spring.

If you do not choose to travel to a tree farm, or purchase a tree that will be part of your landscape, you can also purchase Christmas trees from a lot where the trees have already after having been cut. If you purchase a cut tree, check for freshness. Needles should be supple and spring back when bent. Tap the trunk against the ground a couple of times — if a lot of needles fall off the tree continue your search for the perfect tree. After finding the tree, take it home and cut one or two inches off the base of the trunk and stand the tree in plenty of water. Cut trees need a lot of water to prevent drying out.

Some recommended selections for trees are: balsam fir, Douglas fir, deodar cedar, Fraser fir, noble fir, Virginia fir, Colorado blue spruce and white spruce. There are plenty of living Christmas trees for all of us this year. Living Christmas Trees, as with all trees, support life by

absorbing carbon dioxide and other gases, and emitting fresh oxygen. For every living Christmas tree harvested, one to three new seedlings are planted. Enjoy your holiday and enjoy your living Christmas tree.

Winter Landscape, Garden And Tool Cleanup

Carol Atfield

Useful clean up in your garden and landscape can be done when the weather turns cold. Cleaning up ornamental gardens and vegetable beds is a critical part of fall and winter gardening. Excess debris may attract pests and encourage diseases next season. This is especially true if there has been any evidence of plant diseases during the growing season. Soil-borne diseases readily carry over to the next year. Compost all garden debris except plants that have been diseased. Work decaying mulch into the soil to enrich it with organic matter. Add enough fresh mulch to maintain a depth of two or three inches. While planning your landscape and garden for spring, don't forget to call your local Extension office to get the information you need to obtain a soil test.

When your outdoor potted plants die you can recycle the potting soil, assuming the plants were free of disease. Add the potting soil to your compost pile, breaking up the root balls and roots with pruners. After you've emptied the pots make sure to clean and disinfect them. Clay pots may absorb moisture. They may freeze and crack during the winter if left outside.

Mow and mulch fallen leaves or collect them to use as compost. Left on the lawn they can cause disease problems by keeping the grass too wet and shaded. Monitor the amount of rainfall you receive in the winter and supplement if needed. Pay particular attention to any newly planted or transplanted shrubs or trees.

Cold weather is the time to consider moving overgrown shrubs or adding new container-grown plants. Winter is also a good time to assess and prune shade trees and evergreens for shape. Most woody trees and shrubs can safely be pruned December through early March. Plants which bloom in early spring should be pruned after

flowering; those that bloom later in the spring and summer can be pruned during winter. Roses are pruned in mid-February except climbers or spring-only bloomers which are pruned after flowering.

Tool maintenance is also an important part of fall and winter gardening chores. Before storing tools, spray them off with water and dry them thoroughly. Rub them with oil such as vegetable oil and wipe off with a dry rag to prevent rust from forming.

Rub wood handles with a rag soaked in linseed oil to help keep them from splintering. If they are already splintered rub the wood with sandpaper and coat with paste wax. Check and tighten any screws or bolts, and sharpen cutting edges with a sharpening stone. Remove any sap from pruners or loppers using soapy water or turpentine. Add a drop of oil or WD-40 to pivot points and sharpen.

Clean any power tools including the lawn mower and tiller. A wire brush may help remove dirt and debris that is persistent. Be sure the tools dry thoroughly before storing. Remove hoses and drain them before storing for the winter. This will dramatically decrease the chance of their weakening and springing leaks.

Good winter preparation makes for a great start to the new year. Follow these suggestions and you will be ready to go in the spring.

Christmas Cactus

Sally Keenan

Here we are in December just a few short weeks before one of the most splendid holidays of the year, Christmas. It is a time of hope and preparation, and a time to emphasize good works and brotherly love. It seems to me that the Christmas cactus is an excellent symbol of the season.

In its vegetative form the Christmas cactus is rather austere. Its botanical name is *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, named for Frederick Schlumberger, a nineteenth century Belgium explorer and botanist. It produces flat, leaf-like stem segments known as phyllocades that are connected at the mid-veins. The stems begin by growing upright but then branch and bend downward resulting in a pendulous plant suitable for hanging baskets. From December through February the plant bursts forth with perfectly

symmetrical carmine red flowers tinged purple in the center. They seem to me to be a lovely gift of the Christmas season.

Although true cacti these plants are very different from those most people associate with desert flora. The Christmas cacti are native to the tropical mountains north of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They are epiphytes, plants growing on other plants and depending on them for mechanical support but not for nutrients. Thus they do not grow in the ground but in the crotches of tree limbs where debris and decaying organic material have gathered. As tropical cacti they are living fossils left behind by their more advanced relatives who have adapted to drier climates.

As with all plants the Christmas cactus thrives best in conditions similar to its native environment. The plant prefers bright but shaded light similar to what it would receive growing in the crotch of a tree limb. It should be kept moist but not wet. It is best to allow the plant to dry out slightly between watering.

Flowering in Christmas cacti depends on temperature and sometimes on the length of exposure to light. If the growing temperature is between 50-59 degrees Fahrenheit the plant will set buds regardless of the day length; between 60-68 degrees Fahrenheit plants will bud only if there are less than 11 hours of sunlight daily; above 70 degrees the plant remains vegetative no matter the length of the days. To encourage blooming set the Christmas cactus on a cool porch or windowsill. If the temperature remains above 60 degrees Fahrenheit select a location that limits the time in light to less than 11 hours.

As Christmas approaches consider taking one of these ancient plants to a friend or neighbor. And don't forget to wish them a very Merry Christmas.

Extension Entomologist Speaks to TVCC Horticulture Students Carol Atfield

On November 20, the students and potential Master Gardeners in Rick Hirsch's Horticulture class heard a fascinating lecture given by Kimberly Schofield, Extension Entomologist from Dallas. She spoke on
(see **Entomologist** pg. 3)

A Word from the President Sharon Barrett

Last Thoughts.....

I always begin a project with determining goals and end it by determining whether they were met and whether I feel that it mattered. When the executive committee first met two years ago we did set goals. We were purposeful in making those goals pertinent to our mission and achievable. My wrapping up musings clearly tell me that we did successfully meet those goals. Yet, if I judge the past two years by the achievement of goals only I wouldn't fully appreciate the whole of the experience of leadership within this group.

It wouldn't take into consideration the beautiful kaleidoscope of personalities and talents that interact in the accomplishment of those goals. It wouldn't account for the amazing abilities of organization, of graphic design or research, of marketing, data collection, writing, money sense, public speaking and teaching, editing, design and just plain physical labor. And that's all on top of the gardening talent! Oh, and did it matter? Time will judge whether it mattered in any global, local or eternal sense. To me, however, it mattered at a very personal level. I love to collect people. People who enter my life briefly or for a lifetime; people who are quiet or boisterous; people who are simple or complex, friend or foe, blended in the crowd or quirky. I love collecting people who in turn, for good or bad, become a part of the fabric of my life. The reward for me for the past two years has been simply watching you, learning from you and getting to know you. I thank you for that privilege.

We were a good group suffering growing pains when we came into office and it has been our pleasure to watch the group grow and change as new members have joined us, valued members departed and new ideas and talents have been introduced. As we leave the leadership role we can still say that we are a good group suffering growing pains. The growing pains now are different and new challenges present themselves. We happily pass these exciting challenges into the capable hands of our new president, Michael Sambogna, and encourage all of our membership to fully support him as he leads us in new directions.

Welcome Michael!

Entomologist (continues)

several subjects including the Classification System established by Carolus Linnaeus, the Swedish born "father of taxonomy," who developed today's system of scientific names for plants and animals.

INSECTS

The focus of Kimberly's discussion was insects and she came armed with a number of interesting examples – both dead and alive. Insects are the most diverse form of life on planet Earth. Fifty-nine percent of living species are insects, 21% are plants, 13% are other animals and 7% are other arthropods.

Some interesting facts Kimberly presented include:

If you weighed all ants, their weight would equal that of the human population.

Over one million insects have been identified, and experts think there are three to four million that still have not been identified.

Some dragonflies can eat small fish.

Sixty percent of all insects are beetles.

Seeing the large American cockroach does not mean that there is an infestation at that site. However, seeing the smaller gold colored German cockroach, which is between ¾ inch and 1 inch long, probably means heavy infestation.

FIRE ANT OVERVIEW AND UPDATE

Kimberly also gave a comprehensive overview of red imported fire ants. They were introduced in the 1930s from Brazil, coming in shipments to Mobile, Alabama. They spread throughout the southern U.S. first through grass and woody ornamentals in landscapes. Today they have infested over 360 million acres.

Their beneficial aspects are that they feed on urban insects including chinch bugs, flea larvae, cockroach eggs, ticks and some scorpions. They also feed on agricultural insects, the pink bollworm, corn earworm, and boll weevil. Fire ants aerate the soil through their construction of underground colonies.

Fire ant control has become an expensive proposition. Two billion dollars is spent annually for control; over \$200 million per year is spent for control in the DFW area alone.

There are multiple queens per colony, and a queen's lifespan is 7 years. A queen can lay 1,200 eggs/day. Colonies can be formed anywhere, but compact soil in a sunny locations is preferred.

Kimberly reviewed control mechanisms such as baits, granules and organic remedies. For proper selection of fire ant treatments one should look at the speed of control, duration of control, and cost of control. Home remedies such as gasoline, home cleaning agents, grits, sugar, baking soda, flour are not effective. They may move the mound but are not deadly to fire ants.

The Extension Service is constantly researching fire ant control and there is a remedy on the horizon. The phorid fly has been released in several areas of Texas including Denton and Wise Counties. They will eventually be released all over Texas. The phorid fly lays its egg in the fire ant worker body which provides food for the fly larva. The fly develops in the head of the fire ant.

For additional information and specifics on Extension's ongoing efforts, controls and other interesting facts go to <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.

Fruit Trees

Rich Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Healthy fruit trees are better able to survive insect and disease damage than plants already stressed by cultural problems. Optimum tree growth is maintained by following a well-balanced fertility program, selecting adapted disease-resistant varieties, and irrigating and pruning as needed.

Clean-up and residue disposal are important in reducing plum curculio, hickory shuckworm, brown rot of peach and pecan scab. Diseased material that is properly composted can be recycled as mulch or organic material.

Before using any pesticide, carefully read all instructions

Before using any pesticide, carefully read all instructions on the container. Wear protective clothing during mixing or spraying, and follow the instructions. Mix pesticides in a well-ventilated area or outdoors. Avoid chemical contact with the skin and do not breathe chemical vapors. Prepare only the amount required for one application.

Take necessary precautions when applying pesticides to avoid chemical exposure. Apply pesticides at the proper rate. Using less chemical than prescribed may result in poor control, while using more than recommended may result in excessive residue on the fruit or in plant damage.

A number of different sprayers can be used to apply insecticides and fungicides. Compressed air sprayers range in size from 1 to 10 gallons; because of cost and handling ease, most homeowners prefer the 2½ to 3 gallon sizes. Hose-on sprayers are less expensive but require a high volume of water, moderate pressure and a convenient water outlet. Applying wettable powders with a hose-on sprayer is difficult.

Once a sprayer has been used it is considered a used pesticide container and requires proper handling and storage. Proper cleaning prolongs its life. Do not apply insecticides and fungicides with a sprayer previously used to apply herbicides; this may cause plant damage. It is best to have at least two sprayers; one for "herbicides" and the other for "insecticides" to avoid contamination.

Store chemicals in a secure area away from pets and children. Properly dispose of any unused, diluted sprays and empty pesticide containers. Store pesticides in original containers.

Mary's Cornbread Dressing

Maurena Spadley

4 pkgs Cornbread Mix (not sweet)
1 pkg Bread Stuffing Mix
(clear package not box)
1 Chicken (whole or cut up)
for homemade broth
4 Eggs, boiled and chopped
1 lg Onion, chopped
6 stlks Celery, chopped (save tops)
1 pkg Light Pork Sausage
3 Tbls Dry rubbed Sage
1 Tbls Poultry Seasoning
2 sticks Butter
Salt and pepper to taste

Boil Chicken in large soup pot on medium heat in water with celery tops, 1 stick of butter, salt and pepper to taste for about 30 - 40 min or until meat is completely done and tender. Remove chicken from pot and strain liquid. Set chicken broth aside to cool. You will not use the chicken meat in this recipe.

Boil eggs for 10 minutes on low heat, peel and let cool before chopping them. Cook 2 double batches of cornbread according to package directions and set aside to cool. You may want to cook this the day before so that cornbread is dry and easily crumbled.

Cook pork sausage in skillet and crumble meat as it browns, drain and set aside to cool.
Sauté onion and celery in skillet with 1 stick of butter until tender, set aside to cool.

In a large baking dish or pan that is at least 3 inches deep and 9 – 10 inches long. Crumble cornbread into pan and mix in the dry stuffing mix. Add the sausage, onion and celery mix, chopped eggs, sage and poultry seasoning. Mix this thoroughly (don't be afraid to use your hands) and begin adding the homemade broth until mixture is wet but not soupy. Just until broth "sits" on top of dressing. You may need to add a little canned broth, if necessary. You may adjust seasonings at this time by tasting dressing.

Put foil over pan of dressing and bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking for 30 minutes or until dressing is lightly browned on top and starts to pull away from sides of pan. Serve with your favorite turkey or giblet gravy and fresh cranberry relish. And of course, the turkey!

Makes approximately 12 servings.

I cannot be precise about the liquid measurement because Mom never measured anything! I would guess it is about 6 cups. To tell the truth I guessed on the seasoning measurements, as well. But you can taste as you go like Mom and I always did because there are no raw ingredients in the recipe. I hope this is a hit at your house. Although my Mother is not longer with us her dressing will always be at the center of all our Thanksgiving feasts. I am passing it down to all the grandkids and now to all of you. Enjoy!

Chicken Curry Salad Yvonne Perano

Boneless Chicken Breasts from 2 Chickens

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(1 lg pkg. boneless chicken breasts)
1 cube chicken bouillon
1 cup fresh seedless grapes cut in halves
3 stalks chopped celery
½ cup white raisins
1 pkg. sliced almonds (about ½ cup)
2 peeled and diced apples
1 cup +- Miracle Whip Salad Dressing
2 tsp. Curry Powder (or to taste)

Boil chicken breasts in chicken bouillon and water. Cool and cube chicken. Mix with grapes, raisins, celery, almonds and apples. Add enough Miracle Whip to bind mixture together. Add curry powder, salt and pepper to taste.

Best when refrigerated overnight.

Tortellini Salad Gwen McGlaun

1 pkg. cheese tortellini
1 head broccoli floweret's (cut small)
1 small bottle zesty Italian dressing
1/4 c. parmesan cheese
1 small jar pimento (drained)

In sealable bowl, place broccoli, dressing, and pimentos. Prepare tortellini as directed. Drain & pour over ingredients in bowl while still hot. Immediately mix. Stir in cheese and seal. Place in fridge until chilled (1-2 hours) or overnight. Stir and enjoy.

Green Chili Chicken (Turkey) Enchiladas Yvonne Perano

2 cans green chili enchilada sauce
1 can ripe olives – sliced
2 cans diced Ortega green chilis
4 cups cubed chicken or turkey
1 ½ cup sliced almonds – roasted
4 cups mozzarella or other white cheese shredded
1 pkg. corn tortillas

Mix ¾ can of green chili enchilada sauce with remaining ingredients. (Save some cheese for the top.) Roll mixture into tortillas and seal with a toothpick. Cover with remaining sauce & cheese. Bake at 350 for 20 minutes, or until hot and the cheese is melted.

Note: Try adding a dash of cumin to taste.

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<http://agfacts.tamu.edu/D5/Henderso/hc-mg.htm>
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**Henderson County
Master Gardeners Association
101 East Tyler Street
Athens, TX 75751-2547
Phone: 903-675-6130
Fax: 903-677-7222**

The Henderson County Master Gardener Association is sponsored by the Henderson County Cooperative Extension Service which is a part of the Texas A&M University System. Its objectives are to increase knowledge of gardening to its members and the general public, and to provide the community with information on good gardening practices.

If you have received this newsletter in error, or to provide us with a change of address, please contact the Henderson County Extension Office at (903)-675-6130.