



# Home Gardening Newsletter



December-January  
2023-2024



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## Decorate Your Home with a Poinsettia

As Christmas approaches, traditions such as baking cookies, caroling and decorating homes with wreaths, garlands and a Fraser fir Christmas tree are very common throughout most of Appalachia. Consider adding the “final touch” with a poinsettia touted as one of the most popular Christmas flowers used in decorating households for the holidays!

The poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherima*) derived its name from Joel Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico who introduced the poinsettia to the United States in 1825. Today, poinsettias are perhaps the most recognizable holiday flower with over 70 million sold annually in the United States alone and about 100 different varieties in a diversity of colors including white, pink, peppermint, marble and every tint of red, crimson, and scarlet imaginable. When browsing through the store, choose a poinsettia with a small, tight cluster of flowers. The large, showy colorful bracts are actually leaves not flowers. Select plants that are thoroughly colored and the expanded bracts are dense with plentiful foliage. Remember the poinsettia plant should be about 2 1/2 times larger than the container size. Be wary of plants on display in a drafty area near the door of the store or with paper, plastic, or mesh around the entire plant, wrappers can reduce air circulation around the plant and cause it to wilt.



To care for your poinsettia, remove the decorative wrapper that covers the container. This will allow excess water to drain from the roots. Place the plant on a saucer to protect the table surface on which the plant is sitting. Place your poinsettia in indirect sunlight and in a room where temperatures range 68-70 degrees. Water your plant when the soil begins to dry and keep soil moist to the touch. Do not allow your plant to stand in water. This will reduce air to the roots and lead to root rot. Do NOT place your plant near drafts such as near a door or a heat vent; also avoid areas near appliances, woodstoves and fireplaces.

Once the holidays are over, cut back your plant leaving 4 to 6 buds. Maintain the poinsettia in a sunny window with appropriate amounts of water and fertilizer. Consider planting the poinsettia, container and all, outside during the summer months. Beginning in September place the plant in complete darkness for at least 8-14 hours, this can be done by placing in a closet with a box over the top of the plant. During the day place the plant in bright sunlight for 6-8 hours a day. In 8 to 10 weeks you will have a blooming poinsettia.

Poinsettias are wonderful plants to fill our homes, churches and offices with warmth during the holidays. Whatever your taste may be, there is a poinsettia to fill that special spot in one of your cozy rooms this season.. For more information about poinsettias go to the NCSU website at <https://poinsettias.ces.ncsu.edu/>



# Wildfire Safety Tips!

For the past several weeks, wildfires have burned in Jackson and Cherokee Counties. Thankfully they are now contained and the burn ban has been lifted. As firefighters battle to protect our property, land and communities, oftentimes, the difference between saving or losing a home in a wildfire can be determined by what you do to prepare your property. The Forest Service calls it being Fire Wise.

Fire Wise landscaped properties typically have a defensible space extending at least 100 feet or more from a structure. Fire Wise yards will have grass, rock or evergreen ground covers surrounding them. This empty space creates an area of land where the intensity of a wildfire cannot reach as it literally has nothing that easily burns. Once the OK is given to return to your property, the difference between having a home burned to the ground versus a home intact with smelling only smoke can depend upon something as simple as your choice of landscaping.

To create a defensible space around your home, it is not necessary to remove all plants. Create islands or clumps of plants that are separated by areas that won't burn readily such as lawn, dirt and gravel/stone walkways. Prune plants so that the lowest tree branches are separated vertically from the tallest shrubs or grass by at least 10 feet. Isolate or remove plants that are known to be highly flammable. Maintain a space of 2 to 5 feet immediately adjacent to the house that is cleared of all shrubs and dead plant materials. For more information on how to Firewise your landscape go to: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/fire-resistant-landscaping-in-north-carolina>

If you have not already done so, now is a good time to take steps to reduce wildland fire risks to your property. Here are some suggestions from the National Fire Protection Agency:

## Steps to take around your home before a wildfire threatens:

- Clear leaves and other debris from gutters, eaves, porches and decks. This prevents embers from igniting your home.
- Remove dead vegetation and other items from under your deck or porch, and within 10 feet of the house.
- Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent debris and combustible materials from accumulating.
- Remove flammable materials (firewood stacks, propane tanks) within 30 feet of your home's foundation and outbuildings, including garages and sheds. If it can catch fire, don't let it touch your house, deck or porch.
- Wildfire can spread to tree tops. Prune trees so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet from the ground.
- Keep your lawn hydrated and maintained. If it is brown, cut it down to reduce fire intensity. Dry grass and shrubs are fuel for wildfire.
- Inspect shingles or roof tiles. Replace or repair loose or missing tiles to prevent ember penetration.
- Cover exterior attic vents with metal wire mesh no larger than 1/8 inch to prevent sparks from entering the home.
- Enclose under-eave and soffit vents or screens with metal mesh to prevent ember entry.

## When a wildfire comes:

- Stay aware of the latest news and updates from your local media and fire department. Get your family, home and pets prepared to evacuate
- Place your emergency supply kit and other valuables in your vehicle.
- Move patio or deck furniture, cushions, door mats and potted plants in wooden containers either indoors or as far away from the home, shed and garage as possible.
- Close and protect your home's openings, including attic and basement doors and vents, windows, garage doors and pet doors to prevent embers from penetrating your home.
- Connect garden hoses and fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs, or other large containers with water. Firefighters have been known to use the hoses to put out fires on rooftops.

## For more information go to - National Fire Protection Agency

<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA>

# December and January Horticulture Tips

## Lawns

- A mulching mower can do a good job of chopping those fallen leaves if there are not too many. Another option is to put on the bagging attachment to chop and collect the leaves. They make a good addition to the compost pile.
- Do not allow a heavy layer of leaves to smother ground covers, evergreen perennials or pansies.



## Vegetables

- Cover lettuce and tender greens with row cover fabric if a hard freeze is in the forecast.
- Leafy greens can be harvested by pulling the whole plant, or by removing lower leaves and allowing the plant to continue to grow.
- Most of the winter vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli and greens, do not need protection from cold temperatures until nights fall into the low 20s.
- Remove the dead ferns from the asparagus bed.
- Monitor greenhouses, cloches and cold frames daily. Temperatures heat up quickly on a sunny day.

## Fruits

- Finish fall cleanup, rake leaves and remove any fruit left in trees or on the ground.
- Do not prune fruit trees until March.
- Wait until nighttime temperatures are consistently below freezing to mulch the strawberry beds with straw for winter protection.



## Ornamentals

- Cut greenery and berries for Holiday decorating. Use sharp pruners to make cuts above a bud or side branch.
- Check landscape beds for winter annual weeds. Remove them now as they will only be larger in the spring.
- To enjoy the poinsettia as long as possible, give it very little direct sunlight, keep it away from heat vents and cold drafts, and water regularly.
- Keep good pruning practices in mind when cutting holiday greenery. Make clean cuts at branch angles or leaf nodes, and keep an eye on the shape of the plant.
- Inspect house plants, especially any that spent the summer outdoors. They often carry in small insects such as scale, mealybugs, whiteflies and spider mites.
- Before bringing a live Christmas tree indoors, give it a good shake and even a good cleaning with the garden hose to remove pollen and hitchhiking insects.



## Other

- Make repairs to garden equipment before storing for the winter.
- Clean oil and sharpen garden tools.
- Drain rain barrels. Some people simply leave the tap open for the winter, others reinstall the down spout and store the barrel.
- Along with the holiday greetings, the garden catalogs will be arriving in the mail. Start flagging your wish list pages for spring orders.
- Turn compost pile and take soil samples. Dec. 1st - March 31st is \$4/box/plot and free from April 1st through November 30th each year.

## Caring for Cut Christmas Trees

1. Purchase a fresh tree with needles that do not fall off when shaken.
2. Recut the base of the stem and stand it in water as soon as you get it home.
3. Store the tree outdoors, standing in a bucket of water and in the shade until it is brought inside.
4. Avoid exposing the tree to heat sources e.g., wood stoves and warm drafts.
5. Be sure your tree stand is large enough to hold adequate water. Check the water level daily and keep the cut surface covered with water at all times. A cut Christmas tree will absorb between 2 pints and one gallon of water per day. Use plain water, no additives.



Page 4



Happy Holidays  
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