



# Hopkins County Horticulture Newsletter Winter 2022-2023

### Cooperative Extension Service

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**Poinsettias** (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are subtropical plants originating from Mexico and Central America but are used as a popular indoor plant in the U.S. during the Christmas season. Poinsettias are known for their colorful floral bracts, which are actually just modified leaves. The true flowers on poinsettias are the small clusters of yellow blooms (cyathia) in the center of the colorful bracts. Poinsettia bracts come in a wide range of colors including red, white, pink, peach, etc. and may also come in variegated, marbled, or speckled forms with varying bract shapes. In order to keep your poinsettia happy and healthy this holiday season, follow these helpful tips:

- **Sunlight:** Place your poinsettia in bright, indirect light for at least 6 hours a day. Putting poinsettias in too much direct sunlight may cause the color on the bracts to fade.
- **Temperatures:** Keep temperatures between 65-70°F. Do not let temperatures go above 70°F or below 50°F. Avoid placing poinsettias near drafts, air currents, or excessive heat or dry air.
- **Watering:** Poinsettias do best in moist soil conditions so it is important to water them thoroughly when the surface of the soil feels dry to the touch.
- **Fertilizing:** Poinsettias will not need to be fertilized when in bloom. After bloom, a well-balanced fertilizer (10-10-10) can be applied every two to three weeks during the spring, summer, and fall.
- **Pruning:** During the spring, once the bracts have faded in color, prune the poinsettia back to about 8 inches. The plant will appear bare but will develop new growth.

- **Keeping Outdoors:** Poinsettias may be placed outside once the night temperatures are warmer (above 50°F).
- **Repotting:** In early to mid June, plants can be transplanted into a larger container about 2 to 4 inches bigger than the original container.
- **Forcing to Bloom (next season):** Poinsettias are a photoperiod, short-day plant, meaning it requires longer periods of darkness (longer nights) to bloom. In order to force your poinsettia to re-bloom, you will need to keep the plant in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night starting on October 1st and continue for 8 to 10 weeks. The best way to keep the plant in darkness is either by covering it up with a large box or moving it into a dark room or closet. Make sure the plant still receives about six to eight hours of bright, indirect light each day. If all goes well, then the poinsettia should bloom in November or December.

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## Thanksgiving and Christmas Cacti: What's the difference?

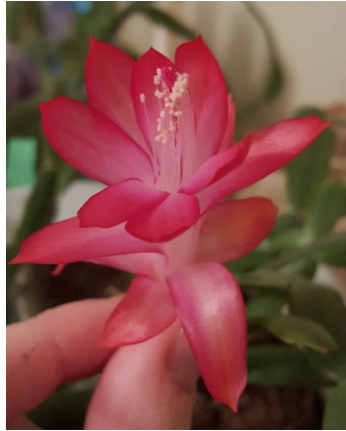
Did you know that holiday cacti are not your typical cactus? They originate from the rain forests of Brazil and grow as epiphytes in tree branches. Holiday cacti such as the Thanksgiving and Christmas Cactus are popular fall and winter houseplants that are well known for their colorful tubular flowers. Many people will often mistakenly identify Christmas and Thanksgiving cacti or may not even know that there is actually a difference between the two plants. The best way to distinguish between the two cacti is by their flattened stem segments known as phylloclades. Thanksgiving cacti (*Schlumbergera truncata*) have pointed/saw-toothed edges on their phylloclades, whereas the toothed edges on



Thanksgiving Cactus Phylloclade and Flower



Christmas Cactus Phylloclade and Flower



Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) are more rounded. If grown under normal conditions, both cacti will usually flower around the holiday based on their name. Thanksgiving cacti will typically bloom around Thanksgiving, and Christmas cacti will bloom around Christmas. Thanksgiving cacti are

often hybridized and produce flowers ranging in colors including: red, rose, pink, purple, lavender, orange, peach, white, and yellow. There is also another holiday cactus known as the Easter Cactus (*Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*) that produces star-shaped flowers in the spring and comes in a variety of colors including red, orange, pink, and white.



Easter Cactus



# Norfolk Island Pine Trees

If you've ever gone to a garden center or the garden department of a big box store around the holidays, then you've probably seen an adorable potted tree known as a Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*). This festive, little tree is often used as a miniature Christmas tree in many homes but also makes a great houseplant all year round. Despite its name, this tree is actually not a pine tree but belongs to the Araucariaceae family, an ancient group of conifers.



Norfolk Island Pine Trees are native to the South Pacific where they can grow up to 200 feet tall! I was fortunate to see a lovely specimen in my travels to New Zealand. Most likely though, your little Christmas tree will

only grow four to six feet tall as a houseplant. Because the Norfolk Island Pine is considered a subtropical tree, it will not tolerate temperatures lower than 45°F, so be sure to bring your tree indoors during the winter months if you are keeping it outside during the summer.



If you plan on keeping your pine tree as a houseplant then be sure to put it near a window that receives bright, indirect light and water well when the soil begins to dry out. This plant is a pretty slow grower, so don't be sad if you only see it grow a few inches during

the year. As for fertilizer, these plants really don't need to be fertilized very often. Fertilize your tree with a houseplant fertilizer once a month when it is actively growing. Repot every few years.

If you plan on using it as a Christmas Tree, keep in mind that the branches will not hold large, heavy ornaments. Use light weight ornaments and small lights and remove as soon as the holidays are over to prevent any injury. If you treat your little tree well, then it will reward you as a beautiful houseplant and may even be reused as a lovely Christmas Tree for next year!

# Winter Interest for Your Gardens

After the leaves have fallen and the flowers have died, gardens and landscapes can look pretty dull and grim during the winter months. Here are a few ideas for keeping some visual interest in your garden beds this winter. Add some beauty to those dreary landscapes!

- **Shrubs with Berries:** Consider planting ornamental shrubs that will produce colorful berries that last throughout the winter months. Winterberry Holly is a great example, producing bright red to orange-red berries. American Bittersweet and Chokeberry also produce colorful berries that persist into the winter. Shrubs that produce berries also make great natural decorations for the holiday season.
- **Ornamental Grasses:** The tall and flowing flower stems of ornamental grasses will last through the winter and create a sense of movement in the landscape. Hold off on cutting these grasses back until the late winter to early spring.
- **Trees with Unique Stems:** To add some color to your winter landscape, plant trees with colorful or uniquely shaped stems. Red Osier dogwoods have bright, red stems that create quite the color splash when grouped together. New twigs on the Golden Willow tree are vibrant yellow. The curly (corkscrew) willow tree has unique, twisted stems that will draw in attention.
- **Spent Flower Stalks and Seed Heads:** As tempting as it is to trim and remove spent flowers and seed heads from your perennial



plants to create a more clean, pristine garden, don't do it! These seed heads not only provide food for wildlife over the winter, but they also provide some visual interest as well. Seed heads of black-eyed susans and coneflowers will resemble little snow caps after a snowfall, which creates a lovely winter display in the garden.

# Make Winter Green-Thumb Friendly with an Indoor Garden

**Rick Durham, UK extension horticulture professor**

Gardening is often thought of as a spring and summer pastime, but you don't have to give up your gardening hobby just because winter is approaching. Continue working your green thumb this winter with an indoor container garden. Container gardening refers to planting in containers rather than a traditionally tilled plot of land. Container gardening is a great way to bring your plants in from the cold and utilize small spaces such as windowsills and tabletops. While the variety of crops you can plant in container gardens isn't as vast as traditional gardens, there are still a variety of planting options. Here are some easy plants to grow indoors this winter:

**Scallions**: For scallions, also known as green onions, you can cut off the tip with the roots and place it in a glass with about an inch of water. When the roots are 2-3 inches long, plant them in potting soil in a shallow container. You can either harvest the green tops and let the plant continue to grow or use the entire green onion.

**Garlic greens**: Plant a garlic clove in a few inches of potting soil mix for garlic greens. You won't be able to grow bulbs, but the green portion tastes garlicky and serves as a good substitute, either raw or sauteed.

**Microgreens**: Microgreens refer to small edible greens grown from the seeds of vegetables and herbs such as broccoli and beets. Make sure the seeds you use are labeled for use as microgreens so there is no coating that may contaminate the plant. Sow the seeds thickly in new, clean potting soil in shallow containers like disposable aluminum pans with one to two inches of potting soil. Microgreens typically mature after 12-14 days or closer to 21 days for larger seeds and reach an average height of 4-5 inches tall. These can be used in salads, wraps or garnishes once fully grown.

**Carrots**: Small carrots are easy to grow in potting soil. Sprinkle the seeds on top of the soil in a pot or long window box, lightly cover with damp peat moss and water well. And don't throw away those carrot tops. They're edible and nutritious and can be used in soups and sauces and even smoothies.

**Herbs**: Basil, chives and parsley are extremely easy to grow indoors. Parsley demands more humidity, so misting the plants will help them flourish. Use organic fertilizer to help your herbs reach their full potential.

One of the biggest challenges with indoor gardening is the lighting limitations. While you should utilize as much natural light from windows as possible, some plants may need additional light from grow lights. Grow lights come in all price ranges and styles, from full-spectrum fluorescent lights to LED plant lights that are a bit more expensive but use less electricity than fluorescent lights. Incandescent bulbs do not emit the right spectrum of light for plant growth.

Another issue you may come across is ensuring your containers have proper drainage. You should use potting soil, which has better drainage, rather than garden soil. Be sure your containers have a hole for drainage and are placed atop a detachable saucer or in a tray to catch extra water. After the water has drained into this catching device, empty excess water to lower the risk of root rot.

Even though you are using clean, presumably "sterile" potting soil, you should wash any plant parts thoroughly before consuming, especially if you are using them raw.



# Plate it up! Recipes for Winter



## Ratatouille Soup

- |                                    |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 small eggplant, peeled and cubed | 1 medium bell pepper, chopped                             | 1 <b>24 ounce</b> jar chunky garden style pasta sauce |
| 2 <b>teaspoons</b> salt            | 1 medium onion, chopped                                   | 2 <b>cups</b> water                                   |
| 1 <b>pound</b> lean ground chuck   | 1 <b>tablespoon</b> finely minced garlic (about 3 cloves) | 1 <b>teaspoon</b> dried basil                         |
| 1 <b>tablespoon</b> canola oil     | 1 <b>14.5 ounce</b> can low sodium beef broth             | 1 <b>cup</b> uncooked whole grain pasta               |
| 1 medium zucchini, chopped         |   |   |

**Place** the cubed eggplant in a colander. **Toss** with the salt and let set for 20-25 minutes. Thoroughly **rinse** in cold water and press as much water out of the eggplant as possible. Set aside. In a large heavy pot, **brown** the ground beef over medium heat until crumbly and no longer pink. **Drain**. Raise the heat to medium-high. **Add** the canola oil to the same pot. **Return** the beef to the pot. **Add** the zucchini, bell pepper, onion and garlic. **Cook** together for 5-7 minutes, until onion is translucent. **Add** the eggplant to the mixture and continue to **cook** for 5

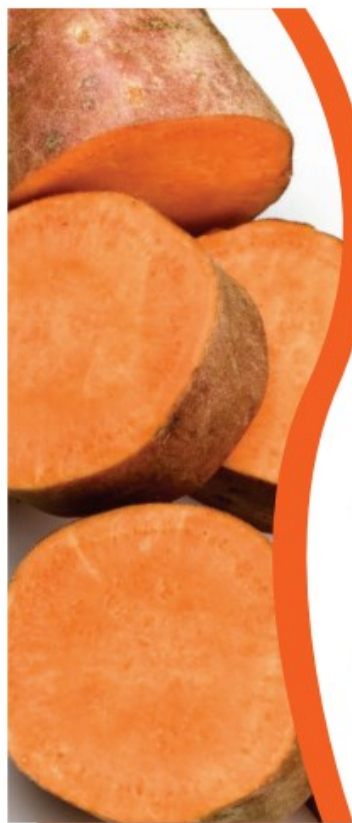
minutes. **Add** the beef broth, pasta sauce, water and basil. Bring to a **boil**, then reduce heat to medium-low, **cover** and **simmer** for 10 minutes. **Add** the pasta. Raise heat to medium. Bring to a slow **boil** and **cook**, stirring occasionally for 10-12 minutes, or until the pasta is tender.

**Yield:** 12, 1 cup servings

**Nutritional Analysis:** 210 calories, 10 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 35 mg cholesterol, 680 mg sodium, 19 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 8 g sugar, 13 g protein



Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.



## Sweet Potato Crisp

- |   |                                     |                                 |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3 <b>large</b> fresh sweet potatoes, cooked until tender. | 1 <b>teaspoon</b> vanilla           | ½ <b>cup</b> all-purpose flour  |
| 8 <b>ounces</b> reduced fat cream cheese, softened        | 1 <b>tablespoon</b> ground cinnamon | ⅔ <b>cup</b> quick cooking oats |
| 1 <b>cup</b> brown sugar, divided                         | 2 <b>medium</b> apples, chopped     | 3 <b>tablespoons</b> butter     |
|   |                                     | ¼ <b>cup</b> chopped pecans     |

- Preheat** oven to 350° F. Lightly spray a 13 x 9 x 2 inch pan with non-stick spray.
- Mash** sweet potatoes. Add cream cheese, ⅔ cup brown sugar, vanilla and cinnamon. Mix until smooth.
- Spread** sweet potato mixture evenly into pan.
- Top** sweet potatoes

- with chopped apples.
- In a small bowl, **combine** flour, oats, and ½ cup brown sugar. **Cut** in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbles. **Stir** in pecans.
- Sprinkle** mixture over apples.
- Bake** uncovered for 35-40 minutes or until

topping is golden brown and fruit is tender.

**Yield:** 16, ¾ cup servings.

**Nutritional Analysis:** 240 calories, 6 g fat, 3 g sat fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 200 mg sodium, 44 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 20 g sugar, 4 g protein.

Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.





# *Save the Date!*

## *Upcoming Events for 2023!*

### Spring Lawn and Garden Fair

Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 9 to 2 p.m.

Hopkins County Farmers Market

### Spring Plant Swap

Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2 to 4 p.m.

Hopkins County Farmers Market

### Art in the Garden

Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, Time TBD

Hopkins County Extension Office

### Fall Plant Swap

Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2 to 4 p.m.

Hopkins County Farmers Market







# *Save the Date!*

## *Upcoming Classes for 2023!*

Starting Seeds Indoors: January 30th at 5:30 p.m. Want to get an early start to your garden this year? Come and learn how to start flower and vegetable seeds indoors and keep them alive and thriving until they are planted outdoors

Orchids 101: February 27th at 5:30 p.m. Learn about different species of orchids and how to care for them

Spring Wildflowers: March 20th at 5:30 p.m. Spring is finally in the air! Learn about different spring wildflowers that bring life back to the dreary Kentucky landscape

All classes will be held at the extension office.  
RSVP at 270-821-3650.

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