



Shades of Green

Athens-Clarke County Agriculture and Natural Resources E-Newsletter

January 2021

What's inside this issue...

Articles

[A Note From Athens-Clarke County
Agriculture and Natural Resources](#) Pg. 2

[How to Keep Your Holiday Plants
Healthy Year-Round](#) Pg. 3

[Enjoy an Inside Spring](#) Pg. 4

[Houseplant Help](#) Pg. 5

Programming and Resources

[Online Green Thumb Lecture](#) Pg. 7

[Stay in the Loop!](#) Pg. 8

[Helpful Resources](#) Pg. 11

A note from Athens-Clarke County Agriculture & Natural Resources

Hello readers and Happy New Year! We hope you all enjoyed a wonderful holiday season. We are very much looking forward to this new year. This week, we are starting our first Master Gardener course with a completely online format. We are excited to get to know this new group of trainees. We are also looking forward to our 2021 Green Thumb Lectures this year. Our first class for the year will take place in February and will be on [Raised Beds and Garden Fences](#). Make sure to keep an eye out for our other upcoming topics in the following months. As always, feel free to reach out to our office if you have questions or would like to know about any of the services we offer.

We hope you enjoy this month's issue of "Shades of Green".

Take care and happy gardening,
Athens-Clarke County Agriculture and Natural Resources





How to Keep Your Holiday Plants Healthy Year-Round

By Laura Ney

As vibrant holiday plants begin to adorn the shelves of hardware stores, grocery stores and garden centers, consumers are attracted to the pinks, reds and whites atop deep green foliage to add festive pops of color in winter homes. The appearance of plants like poinsettias and Christmas cacti usher in the holiday season and we love to fill our halls and entryways with their holiday cheer. But how about after the holidays?

Most of us accept the demise of these seasonal decorations once the new year begins. But, do we have to? Here are some simple guidelines to keep your poinsettias and Christmas cacti healthy and ready to shine again next year.

Maintain vigor

The best way to understand how to care for these plants is knowing where they come from and understanding the conditions in which they evolved. Both poinsettias and Christmas cacti have their origins in the tropical mountains of Central and South America. Despite the common name of Christmas “cactus,” neither poinsettias nor Christmas cacti are adapted to arid conditions. It is OK, even preferable, to let soils dry out somewhat before watering, but they cannot withstand long periods of dry soil. Sticking your finger an inch or two into the soil or picking up your pots to see if they are heavy or light are good, easy ways of deciding if your plants need to be watered. Each time you water, make sure to water deeply, soaking all of the soil, but making sure the excess water can run freely away from the pot, so that the soil does not stay saturated.

While poinsettias will happily take a spot by a window that gets full sun, the Christmas cactus in its natural habitat lives on the trunks and branches of other plants and prefers indirect or dappled light. This might mean placing your Christmas cactus just to the side of a window or toward the middle of a room instead of right on the window sill.

Both plants will do well in average home temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. However, avoid drastic changes in temperature, such as from a draft, a nearby door or being in the path of air from air conditioning and heating vents.

Maintain aesthetics

Poinsettias naturally grow as a somewhat tall and leggy shrub. In order to maintain an attractive, bushy form, cut back your poinsettia a few times during the year. In the early spring, cut your poinsettia back until about 6 inches of stem remains. Once new growth begins, you can begin fertilizing with a complete fertilizer, following the directions on the fertilizer label. Around July, remove the top of the plants, leaving four to five leaves on each stem. If the plant becomes leggy in early fall, this step can be repeated.

In order to signal color and bud production, both plants need “short day” conditions, which means 12 to 14 hours of total darkness each night. Poinsettias may require these “short days” for up to 10 weeks. This means that, beginning 10 weeks before you wish to see color, the plants will need at

(Continued on page 6)

A close-up photograph of several pink tulips in various stages of bloom, with some buds still closed and others fully open, showing delicate petals and green stems.

Enjoy an Inside Spring

By Willie O. Chance III

Have you noticed that some plants think it's spring? Buds are swelling, some are popping open while others are in full bloom. It happens every year, but some plants seem to get ahead of the weather every year. They are constantly at risk to be frozen by late freezes. Why is this?

Many spring flowering plants form flower buds in late summer. These buds lie dormant until spring. They only bloom after they receive a certain number of hours of cold weather. Good examples of this include azalea, dogwood, spring flowering bulbs, and many fruits.

Why do some plants bloom first every year? These are the ones that require less chilling than others. Their chilling requirement is met early in winter and when a warm spell arrives – their flowers 'pop' open.

In my neighborhood, quince, forsythia and narcissus are out now. Quince and forsythia are low chilling plants. The narcissus requires no cold weather to bloom. It can be planted in pots and will bloom indoors. Other bulbs will do this too. It is called force blooming.

Most spring flowering bulbs need a long period of cool temperatures before bloom. During this time the bulb grows roots and forms flower shoots inside the bulb.

Not all bulbs are easy to force blooming. Narcissus and hyacinths are easiest to force but you can also try tulips, crocus, daffodils, muscari and others.

Select large, firm bulbs without mold, cuts or bruises. Plant them in sterile potting soil in a pot with drainage holes. Wash reused pots and sanitize with a dilute bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water) before planting into them. Soak clay pots for 24 hours before using.

Place one inch of gravel in bottom of pot and add some soil. Arrange bulbs so they are almost touching. Cover bulbs and firm soil around them. Most bulbs are covered by ½ inch of soil except for hyacinths that may protrude slightly above the soil line. Water to settle the soil. Keep soil moist but not wet or soggy since bulbs will rot if kept too wet.

Store potted bulbs in a dark place at 40o to 50o F for six to eight weeks - a little longer for tulips (10 weeks). The best location is probably an old refrigerator that does not cool well. Bulbs can be chilled in any refrigerator, but must not freeze.

After chilling, remove pots and place in a cool (50o - 60oF) dark spot for two weeks. Shoots should appear and get one to two inches long. Then move pots into a well-lit room. Water regularly and keep pots from drafts and heaters. They should bloom within four to six weeks. Flowers will last longer if kept cool, 50o to 60o. Throw bulbs away after bloom since forced bulbs seldom bloom well again.

Trees and shrubs can be brought inside also. Once buds begin to swell, you can cut them and put them in water to bloom indoors. This works well with quince, forsythia and pussy willow but you can also try azalea, cherry, dogwood and pear.

Cutting the flowers just before bloom works best, but they can be cut earlier. Mash the cut end with a hammer. Immediately place in a vase. Replace water daily for best results. Flowers should bloom in a week or so. Here are some suggestions of what to force bloom and when to cut them.

(Willie O. Chance III is a past Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent in Houston County, Georgia)



Houseplant Help By Randy Drinkard

The houseplant that you got for Christmas looked so beautiful during the holidays. Remember how lush and healthy it was then; but now it's pale and wilted. You can't understand how just a few weeks ago your plant was thriving and yet now it is practically dead. Well, you're not alone. The Bartow Extension Service receives many telephone calls from residents who are concerned about their indoor plants. During winter, as opposed to spring and summer months, houseplants are being grown under conditions much less conducive to good growth and vigor. For instance, indoor light intensities are very often quite low or limiting in December and January and this may cause the foliage to fade or turn a yellow-green color. Low humidity and stale, dry air conditions that are created by some home heating systems may weaken plants even more. Temperature extremes may come into play here as well. A fourth factor and probably the most critical factor of all for declining indoor plant health during winter, is improper watering and fertilization. Over-watering frequently sets up the stage for root rot which then in turn finishes off your once-beautiful houseplants.

As you see, low light, low humidity, dry air and too much soil moisture are the primary culprits that can weaken and destroy our indoor plants. Proper management of these growing factors, of course, is essential to your maintaining healthy, vigorous houseplants. How then, you may ask, do I know what to do to correct the problem be-

fore it is too late? That is a good question, but even inexperienced growers can look for certain danger signs that plants show when they are under stress. You can then usually tell what you are doing wrong and take corrective action to revive your plants.

Listed below are the eight most common symptoms expressed by 'sick' plants and help tips.

1) Stems grow abnormally long; leaves become long and pale and new leaves are undersized; growth is weak or spindly: This is almost always due to insufficient light. Give your plants more light by placing them closer to a window or supply supplemental lighting via grow lights.

2) Stems become soft or mushy, dark in color and rotten; lower leaves curl and wilt; soil at the top of the pot is constantly wet. Too much water is the cause. Do not water as frequently or water when the soil is dry to the touch approximately one to two inches below the surface. Sometimes the soil surface may be dry but the root zone may be saturated. Continuing to water plants that are growing in over-saturated soils will inevitably lead to root rot. Make sure your pot's drainage holes are not clogged and don't let your plants sit in water-filled saucers for more than an hour.

3) Wilted foliage: This can actually be caused by underwatering or overwatering. Also, excessive amounts of fertilizers can draw water from the roots, causing the plant to wilt. If the plant has a root or stem disease, this will prevent water uptake, **(Continued on page 6)**

How to Keep Your Holiday Plants Healthy Year-Round (continued...)

least 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness each night. Be aware that even a small amount of light can interrupt this process. Christmas cacti do not require as many short days, but they should be grown in cooler nighttime temperatures of about 50 to 60 F to initiate bud formation. Once color begins to form on poinsettias, or buds begin to form on Christmas cacti, the signaling is complete and you can leave the plants to grow in normal conditions.

Following these basic guidelines can allow you to enjoy your plants again next holiday season.

For more information, see **UGA Extension Circular 951, "Care of Holiday and Gift Plants."**

(Laura Ney is the Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia)

Houseplant Help (continued...)

causing the plant to wilt. Other causes of wilting are low humidity, moving shock, a sudden change in light or temperature, cold or hot drafts, high heat or frost damage.

4) Defoliation: Rapid defoliation may be caused by extremes in temperature, changes in light, overwatering or under watering and exposure to cold and disease. Gradual defoliation, as when the lower leaves turn yellow and drop, can be caused by over watering (root rot), under watering, lack of sufficient light, low fertility or disease. Keep in mind that an occasional leaf may drop due to natural aging...which is normal.

5) Leaves yellowed, wilted and/or mottled: This is often caused by too much water which in turn causes root rot. As mentioned earlier, do not let your plants stand in water. Yellowing may also be caused by severe insect infestations (scale or spider mites), very low light, high temperatures or insufficient amounts of plant fertilizer. Older plants may become pot-bound and a yellowed or wilted condition usually develops. In this case, repot to a larger container using fresh potting soil.

6. Browning of leaf tips: Low humidity, excess fertilizer, water that is high in fluorine, spray damage

from pesticides, unfavorable soil reaction (a high or low soil pH), air pollutants or root loss due to excessive water in the soil will cause tips to brown. Water that contains fluorine should be allowed to sit for several days before using so that the fluorine may bubble out. Simply trim away any brown tips with sharp scissors to improve the looks of your houseplants.

7. Leaf edges are crinkly and brown: This is caused by low humidity. Increase humidity by grouping plants or by placing them on a bed of moistened pebbles in a tray. Misting helps, too.

You may also want to consider placing a cool-vapor humidifier in your plant room to increase humidity.

8. Rot at soil level: This is usually caused by over watering, yet plants that are set too deeply or a fungal or bacterial disease may be the problem. In most cases you will have to discard the plant, although you may be able to start new plants by taking cuttings from upper sections that are healthy.

(Randy Drinkard is a past Bartow County, Georgia Extension Agent)

Athens-Clarke County Extension

Virtual Green Thumb Lectures

2021 Free Monthly Gardening Class Series



February: Raised Beds and Garden Fences

Please join us online for an informative presentation on topics including:

- How to easily build a raised bed
- Options for filling your beds, what and when to plant your beds
- “Show & tell” of the basics of fences and fence materials for your garden or your property
- Strategies in addition to fencing that discourage deer

Gardeners of all experience levels are welcome.

WHEN:

Wednesday, February 10 · 6:00-7:30 pm

WHERE: ONLINE via Zoom.com

Specific link to join Zoom meeting will be sent to the email you register with

TO REGISTER:

Registration is required. Please register by February 9 by visiting

www.accgov.com/gardening

For questions:

Contact Laura Ney, Extension Agent at
706-613-3640 or lney@uga.edu

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Stay in the loop! (local activities and events)



Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Trails and Open Space Programs

Visit [their website](#) for a full list of fun outdoor trails and activities



Athens on Ice at the Foundry Pavilion

Visit [their website](#) for tickets and more details.



The State Botanical Garden of Georgia is open for the public, but make sure to check out [their website](#) for updates and hours.

Contact the State Botanical Garden of Georgia by emailing garden@uga.edu or calling 706-542-1244.

- [Discover education activities for home.](#)
- Take a [virtual tour](#) to see what's blooming.
- Check out their [event calendar](#) for more offerings.

Join Athens-Clarke County 4-H!



Students in 5th - 12th grades in Athens-Clarke County can sign up for 4-H now. The mission of Georgia 4-H is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills, and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society. 4-H meetings will look different this year and are online. There is no charge to be a member or participate in a competition.

To start your 4-H Adventure e-mail the ACC 4-H Agent, Elizabeth Conway, at ebarber@uga.edu today!



Virtual 4-H Programs can be viewed on the ACC 4-H website:

<https://tinyurl.com/acc4hvirtual>

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Concerned about the state of your garden?

Are weeds taking over your landscape?

No need to fear, Clarke is here!



Follow @gardenwithclarke on Instagram and learn how to battle pests, identify weeds, build your soil and so much more as you garden alongside Clarke, Athens-Clarke County's super gardener!



gardenwithclarke
UGA Extension Athens-Clarke County



Helpful resources online:

<u>Find My Local Extension Office</u>	<u>Bugwood— Pest Images</u>	<u>Landscape Alerts Online</u>
<u>Pest Management Handbook</u>	<u>Georgia Turf</u>	<u>Free Online Webinars</u>
<u>SE Ornamental Horticulture Production & IPM Blog</u>	<u>Pesticide Applicator Info</u>	<u>Georgia Certified Plant Professional</u>
	<u>UGA Center for Urban Agriculture</u>	<u>Extension Publications</u>

Athens-Clarke County Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources

Mission Statement

The UGA Athens-Clarke County Extension's mission is to respond to the people's needs and interest in Agriculture, the Environment, Families, and 4-H/youth in Athens-Clarke County with unbiased, research-based education and information.

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