

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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the Cochise County Master Gardener

NEWSLETTER

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THE MIRACLE OF BULBS

Jan Groth
Staff Writer

Just a quick reminder that it's not too late to get those fall bulbs in the ground for that first glorious burst of color in late winter-early spring. Bulbs are a most fascinating perennial, a total unit of a self-contained plant that regenerates year after year with minimal proper care.

A wide variety of bulbs, corms, and tubers will do well in our high desert: hyacinths, daffodils, ranunculus, iris, paperwhite narcissus, crocus, alliums, and more.

Your soil should drain well, but also be able to maintain moisture. Dig the holes about three times as deep as the bulb's greatest diameter. Place one teaspoon to one tablespoon (depending on the size of the bulb) of bone meal or bulb food (high phosphorous for root and flower development) in the bottom of the hole. Cover this with a layer of dirt and then plant the bulb. Once bulbs are placed and covered with dirt, soak the area thoroughly. With occasional winter rain, this should be enough moisture. But, if our air stays dry and the winter is without rain, soak the area periodically throughout the winter and into the blooming season.

After the bulbs bloom, spent flowers may be cut off, but DO NOT cut the leaves. This foliage is manufacturing food and sending it back to the bulb for storage for next year's growth! This period after the blooms fade is also a crucial time when you can add bulb food (high in phosphorous and potassium) to the ground around your bulbs for next year's performance.

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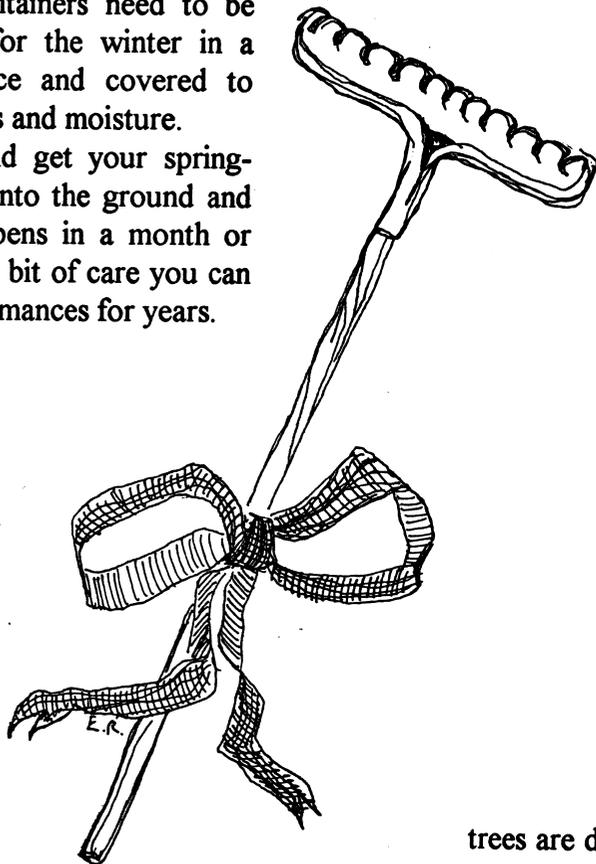
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An established bulb bed which has given multiple performances may benefit from a nitrogen fertilizer application at the beginning of the growing season.

Don't forget—bulbs are also great in containers and do well with occasional soil regeneration and regular fertilization. Container gardening allows you to showcase your bulbs as they bloom and then remove them when the bloom is completed. Just remember—bulbs need a winter chill, so the containers need to be placed outside for the winter in a cold, shady place and covered to maintain coolness and moisture.

So, hurry and get your spring-flowering bulbs into the ground and watch what happens in a month or two! With just a bit of care you can enjoy their performances for years.



Seasons Greetings!

If you are interested in gardening, landscaping, or growing vegetables; if you have questions on what to plant, when to plant it, how much to water it, fertilize it, or prune it; if you want to know why all the leaves fell off your olive tree, or what that bug is that keeps eating your tomatoes and what to do about it, the Master Gardeners are there to help. Call the Cooperative Extension Office—in Sierra Vista call 458-1104, Ext. 141 and in Willcox 384-3594. If we don't have the answer, we'll try to find someone who does!

TAKE A BREAK TODAY

Barry R. Bishop
Staff Writer

Tired of holiday shopping! Then, take a break by working in your garden. There's a host of chores from spraying and pruning to even planting!

Now is the time to prevent fungus diseases and overwintering insects. The cold weather doesn't take care of all things like we hope and we still have challenges. Spray fruit trees, roses, and other deciduous flowering trees with horticultural oil (no, not oil that you put in your automobile), and kill aphids, mites, and scale.

To control peach leaf curl and peach blight, use a dormant spray of fixed copper or lime sulfur. Spray a minimum of three times now through February. If it rains soon after spraying, treat the trees again, and do not count the spray before the rain in your triple dose. For complete coverage, spray the undersides of leaves, as well as branches, trunks, and the ground out to the drip line. Fallen leaves and other debris should be raked and cleaned before spraying. In January or February, when your fruit trees are dormant you may also prune the trees to save on spray.

Plant your winter veggies, bedding plants, and spring blooming bulbs now if you haven't already done so. Plant any spring-blooming bulbs immediately, except tulips which need six to eight weeks of a chilling period. Stagger bulb planting every two weeks and you will extend the blooming period for six weeks or more.



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THE RADICAL GARDENER (Definition)

Elizabeth Riordon
Staff Writer

We are Master Gardeners! We are dedicated to growing, caring for, and propagating plant life. From that point on, we are all very different. Some of us revel in the natural diversity of the plant world. Still others are dedicated to using our knowledge and skills to efficiently produce food. Others are intent to produce a beautiful space, inside or outside their homes. Actually, we are probably a little bit of all these things, depending upon the season and our fluctuating energy levels.

This column is fictional. It pretends that there really is a totally radical gardener out there, somewhere. I believe that, in secret, in a private afternoon or after everyone else is in bed, the real-life radical gardener is fictional. He will, at least once, kill a fly, squash an ant, or put some systemic poison, or just a little synthetic plant food in the pot of a favorite ailing plant.

Christmas List for the Radical Gardener

- Personalized insect cage
- Breaker bar
- Small mesh garden fence, 8' high
- Leather garden gloves
- Earthworms
- Ladybug gift certificate
- Praying mantis gift certificate
- Native grass seeds
- Push lawn mower
- Scythe
- Binoculars
- Snake loop
- Native plant recipe book
- Native plant identification book
- High on the Desert Conference Registration



CARING FOR HOLIDAY PLANTS (Reprinted from the December 1990 Newsletter)

Jackie Dillon-Fast

They arrived with the frozen turkeys in the peak of greenhouse health: brilliant red and soft white bracts, rich pink blossoms, bright deep green stems. Who can resist putting a few *Euphorbia pulcherrimas* or *Schlumbergera bridgesii* in the shopping cart? For us gardeners who have been roaming the empty nurseries looking for left-over pansies, poinsettias and holiday cactus are food for the soul. For nongardeners they are as much a part of the holidays as fruitcakes and Christmas trees.

Few of us, gardener or non, expect our holiday plants to last past January. This expectation is usually reinforced by the hundreds of foil wrapped pots found in the trash each February. However, if they are given proper care, *Euphorbia pulcherrima* and *Schlumbergera bridgesii* will not only live past January, they will bloom again every holiday season.

POINTSETTIAS

Poinsettias grow to ten feet or more in their native Mexico, blooming beautifully each winter with little care. Commercial poinsettia growers use climate controlled greenhouses where they adjust temperature and light to produce blooming poinsettias on schedule. Duplicating these conditions is a sizable challenge for the home gardener.

When you bring your poinsettia home, place it in a sunny window away from drafts or heat sources. Water carefully, keeping the soil moist, but not soggy (one Master Gardener uses ice cubes), and never let water stand in the pot bottom. If you have a humidifier and keep your home on the cooler side (65 ° F), the bloom will last longer.

After the poinsettia leaves drop, reduce watering and continue to keep the plant in a cool spot until spring. This is the plant's dormant period. After the last spring frost, set the plant outdoors in the sun and cut the stems back to two buds. This is a good time to move the plant to a larger pot. Poinsettias will not tolerate being

transplanted during active growth, so choose a pot that you can later bring into the house.

Fertilize the plant lightly to encourage new growth. Pinch back new growth occasionally to promote bushiness. If you forget to do this and the plants gets leggy, don't try to prune it. Poinsettias will not tolerate pruning during active growth.

Your poinsettia will thrive outdoors in the summer heat if it is carefully watered and fertilized. After September, however, the plant needs constant cool temperatures (60 ° F) and high humidity to set buds. Since this is difficult to control outside, bring the plant indoors when night temperatures drop below 60 ° F.

The secret to successful bloom is darkness. Poinsettias require 10 weeks of short days (10 hours of full sun) and long nights (14 hours of UNINTERRUPTED darkness). Without this, the plant will not produce flowers. Move your poinsettia into a closet or cover it with a light-tight box every evening, moving it back into the sun each morning. If you begin forced darkness in October, your poinsettia should be blooming again by Christmas.

Poinsettias are propagated in late summer by rooting stem cuttings having at least four joints or eyes.

HOLIDAY CACTUS

The Christmas Cactus, *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, is one of two holiday cactus that bloom in November and December (a third blooms in spring). All of the holiday cactus are epiphytes (tree dwelling) plants from Central and South America. They are not desert plants, and need soil rich in organic matter with plenty of light and high humidity. Generally they are long-lived. Plants as old as 25 years are not unusual.

When you bring your holiday cactus home, stand the pot in a tray of moist gravel and place it in a sunny window. Overwater, low light, cold drafts, high temperatures, and low humidity can cause bud drop and shorten bloom time. Do not fertilize.

After the cactus stops blooming, let the soil become nearly dry between waterings, but keep the plant in full sun. This is the plant's dormant

period. Do not repot. Holiday cactus does best with slightly crowded roots, and need to be repotted only every three years.

After May you can move the cactus outside but watch the plant carefully through the dry months, and shade it from intense sun. Watch for yellowish or sunburned growth (too much light), or weak spindly growth (too little light). Begin fertilizing lightly every ten days.

For a Christmas bloom, leave the plant outside until night temperatures drop into the fifties. As with the poinsettia, bloom is triggered by temperature and darkness. Holiday cactus thrive in temperatures between 50° and 60° F. They need 4 to 8 weeks of short days (9 hours of light) and long nights (15 hours of UNINTERRUPTED darkness) for buds to form. Move them into a closet in the evening or place them under a light-tight box, and move them back into full sun in the morning.

Propagate in spring by placing stem cuttings in moist sand until rooted. Then move to medium of 2 parts peat moss to one part perlite and one part sand.



Did you know?

Fifty million trees are cut every year for use as decorations and wrapping paper!



High on the Desert

It's almost time!

The second annual High Desert Gardening and Landscaping Conference will be held Thursday and Friday, February 16 & 17, 1995 at the Sierra Vista Ramada Inn with several optional tours scheduled for Saturday, February 18. More than 25 speakers will be here, speaking on a variety of topics. Everyone with a love of the high desert and the gardening and landscaping problems it presents is encouraged to attend. The conference will be bigger and better in 1995!

This year t-shirts will be available commemorating our conference. Orders for the shirts may be placed with your registration!

Registration forms will be included in the January 1995 newsletter or you may call the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension office (602) 458-1104, Ex. 141 for more information or a registration form.

ALKALINE OR ACID?

Barry R. Bishop
Staff Writer

If you pick up any book about gardening, the author immediately starts out with the soil and how one should learn about the soil's pH (the measure of acidity is known as pH). We live in Southeastern Arizona where the soil is generally alkaline and contains a heavy degree of salt (this is not table salt).

Everyone's soil is different—not better or worse—different! Because it is different, we put different amendments in it to bring the pH up or down to where we would like it to be for the plants we grow. Due to the fact we have only about twelve inches of rainfall annually, we live in an area that has a pH of 7.1 or higher. (A pH up to 7 is considered acid, with 7 neutral, and over 7 alkaline.) Because wood ashes out of your stove or fireplace contain lime and lime is alkaline, it is not what your soil in SE Arizona needs.

We harvested the last of our crops from the garden, and now we are taking time to clean up what is left either by tilling it into the soil, hoping that it will breakdown, or by putting the remains on the compost pile. By adding amendments to the soil after the harvest the chemical reactions we hope for can take place before our spring planting and we will have a more productive garden next year.

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Address correction requested



SMILE!

Barry R. Bishop
Staff Writer

This holiday we have got to learn one thing. We have got to learn how to "smile." I speak from experience. I had a heart attack and a stroke, and believe me when I say, "You don't want either." They are no fun and they can ruin your life.

If you are like me, we take ourselves far too seriously. We think how really important we are and that life would really be hampered if we weren't there to make things right. Well, we are important, but not that important and life, yes Virginia, life can go on without us.

Of all things, gardening is great and we are in charge (or are we?). Laugh! Smile! Enjoy! Gardening is fun, but don't make it something it wasn't meant to be. Don't take yourself too seriously and lose more than just the fun of gardening this holiday. See you next year!