



**CLEVELAND COUNTY  
EXTENSION**

# THE NEW HORT THYMES

December 2020

Serving Cleveland County, Oklahoma with the most up to date gardening, lawn, landscaping, and horticulture information.



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## In this issue...

Poinsettias.....	2
Mistletoe.....	3
Plant of the Month.....	4
Garden Tips.....	5
Seasonal Eats.....	5
Upcoming Events.....	6

## Settling in for Winter

*Reflecting and looking forward to the next year*

The temperatures have cooled, the days are quite short, and it is time to settle in for winter. While there may not be as much to do in the garden, it is a great time to reflect on the previous year. 2020 brought many stressors and difficulties, but perhaps there were a few positives. Many were at home and had extra time to focus on their landscapes. Some grew their own food for the first time. Garden centers were abuzz with new customers. I hope that your garden gave you peace this year, rather than stress.

It seems like we've wanted 2020 to end for much of its duration. That time is finally here. Looking forward to next year, we can focus on what was enjoyed, what needs to change, and what new things we may want to try. Check out seed catalogs for new and interesting varieties. Catch up on re-runs of Oklahoma Gardening and other planted-related media. Clean garden tools so they're ready to go in the spring. But also don't forget to spend some time in your winter garden. There is a quiet stillness this time of year that deserves appreciation.

# Season-Long Poinsettia Care

Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are a popular holiday plant because of their colorful leaves. Called bracts, the specialized leaves come in many colors including red, pink, white, and speckled combinations. Poinsettias change color in response to the shorter winter days. In their native environment of Mexico, poinsettias grow to a small tree. Below are some tips for selecting and caring for a poinsettia, along with instructions on how to save it for the following year.

## Selecting a Poinsettia

When purchasing a poinsettia, choose a plant with well-expanded bracts. The bract's color should be developed, expanding through the entire leaf. Foliage should be medium to dark green with uniform coloring. Avoid any plants that show signs of disease or insect damage. The true flowers are small and insignificant in the center of the bracts. While they do not contribute to the visual impact, they should be closed with little pollen present.



## Poinsettia Care

Do not expose the poinsettia to chilling temperatures or cold drafts of air. The poinsettia is a tropical plant by nature and the cooling temperatures can be injurious. Temperatures between 60° and 70°F are ideal. Also ensure that the poinsettia receives six to eight hours of medium light. When watering the plant, check to see the weight of the pot. If it is lightweight and the soil is dry to the touch, it is time to water the poinsettia. Make sure to remove the plastic covering when watering so proper drainage can be achieved.



## Re-Flowering for Next Year

The poinsettia makes a lovely foliage plant during other months of the year. If the plant is properly maintained, it can be saved for the next season. In spring, cut back the original stems to about five inches. Consider repotting if the plant has grown too large. After the threat of frost, poinsettias can be placed outside in a partially shaded area. Apply a complete houseplant fertilizer throughout the summer. In late September, bring the plants inside and place them in a sunny window. To trigger flowering, poinsettias must receive uninterrupted darkness at night. It is best to keep the poinsettia from any artificial light from 5:00pm to 8:00am. Consider places like a dark closet or pantry. Start this routine when the plant is brought inside. Bract color should begin to develop around Thanksgiving.



# The Origins of Mistletoe

Many think of mistletoe as a scrubby twig hung in doorways during the holiday season, along with the tradition of standing underneath it to steal a kiss. However, mistletoe has a long and much more interesting history.

There are hundreds of species of mistletoe throughout the world. The most common in North America is *Phoradendron flavescens*. Mistletoe is a parasitic plant. Instead of growing in the ground and receiving nutrients from the soil, it derives all its nutrients from the host tree. Birds eat the berries and expel them onto tree branches. If the conditions are right, the seeds will germinate. Mistletoe can grow on almost any deciduous tree.

Some researchers believe mistletoe means 'birdlime twig'. This references the old practice of using the berries to make birdlime, a sticky substance used for trapping birds. In ancient Greek and Roman cultures, it was used for its many healing properties. Celtic Druids used it to restore fertility. The druids also believed it provided protection from evil. Trees with mistletoe were also honored in their culture. Norsemen believed it was a plant of peace.



Photo from Michigan State University

Mistletoe spreads and grows relatively slowly, so it is not considered an immediate threat to tree health. Healthy trees should be able to tolerate a few mistletoe plants. Trees that are heavily infested with mistletoe may lose vigor and become stunted. Mistletoe can possibly kill the tree if it is subjected to other external stresses like drought, insect infestation, or disease. Maintaining the health of the tree is the best thing that can be done to heavily infested trees. Adequate watering, proper fertilizing, and applying mulch around the trunk can greatly improve the tree's ability to ward off stress. If mistletoe is localized to one part of the tree, it can be controlled by pruning out infested branches. This is best done in winter by a certified arborist.



Photo from State Symbols USA

## Mistletoe As Oklahoma's State Flower

Mistletoe is Oklahoma's official floral emblem. The momentum began when states were asked to provide floral exhibits at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Some early Oklahomans wanted passion flowers, but mistletoe ultimately won. It was designated as the official floral emblem by the territorial legislature on February 11, 1893. Senator John Golobie filed a bill to retain this distinction after 1907 statehood. It was a controversial decision, but Golobie passionately made the case for mistletoe, recalling that it was the only greenery available to decorate graves during the harsh winter of 1889. The bill became law in 1910.

Information from the Oklahoma Historical Society



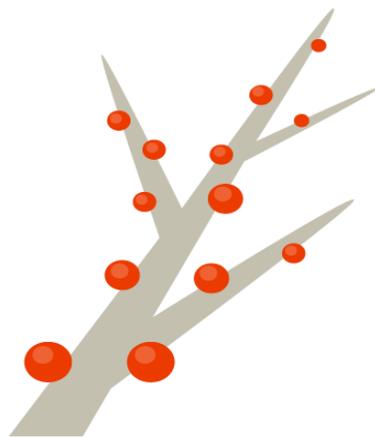
Photo from North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Database

## December Plant of the Month: Possumhaw

A holly that drops its leaves for a winter burst of color

*Ilex decidua* is a native holly that drops its leaves in the winter, leaving bright red berries. Sometimes referred to as a deciduous holly, possumhaw is an upright shrub or small tree with a spreading canopy. It typically grows 7-15' tall and 5-12' wide in cultivation. The bark is light gray brown and smooth. Possumhaw blooms in spring, but the flowers are mostly insignificant. Berries ripen in September and persist through winter until new growth begins in the spring. Possumhaw can tolerate most soil textures, but prefers slightly acidic soil.

Many animals, including birds, deer, and small mammals, are attracted to its berries. Possumhaws are dioecious. For the best show of berries, plant mostly female trees and provide one male to ensure pollination.



**Dioecious:** having male and female flowers on separate plants; female plants bear the fruit

# Garden Tips for December

- Keep all plants watered during dry conditions, even if dormant
- Thoroughly water plantings at least 24 hours before a hard-freeze, if the soil is dry
- Remove leaves from cool-season grasses or mow with a mulching mower; this mitigates disease pressure in the upcoming season
- Continue mowing cool-season (fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass) lawns
- Control broadleaf weeds in well-established lawns with a post-emergent herbicide
- Mulch perennials, rose bushes, strawberries, and bulbs, but wait until after several early freezes; otherwise pests will have a place to overwinter
- Gather up fallen leaves, these are a great spot for insects and diseases to overwinter
- Till bare garden plots to expose over-wintering pests to the cold environment
- Amend garden areas with compost
- Start planning for next year! Now is a great time to map out your vegetable gardens so you know exactly what seeds to order and where to start in the spring
- Visit your county extension office to obtain gardening fact sheets
- Clean supplies and check equipment for repairs
- Order gardening supplies for the upcoming season
- Make structural improvements to the garden and landscape
- Keep bird feeders full and break the ice in the bird baths

# Eat Seasonally

In-season produce is fresher, cheaper, more nutritious, and better for the environment. These are some of the seasonal crops for December:

Beets



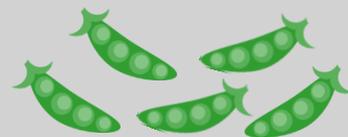
Brussels Sprouts

Collard Greens



Kale

Kohlrabi



Peas

Pomegranates



Sprouts

Sweet Potatoes



## Upcoming Events

To see all OSU Extension events, please visit [www.calendar.okstate.edu/oces](http://www.calendar.okstate.edu/oces)

Use the County/Department filter for events unique to **Cleveland County**.

Use the Program Area filter for events that are specific to **Agriculture and Natural Resources**.



### About the editor...

Courtney DeKalb-Myers has been the Cleveland County horticulture educator since August 2018. Her position handles homeowner inquiries, master gardener advisement, and other horticulture education programming throughout the state. She is originally from Norman, Oklahoma and developed a passion for gardening at a young age. She went onto study horticulture at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater with an emphasis in entrepreneurship. After graduating from OSU, she moved to Raleigh, North Carolina to attend NC State for graduate school. Her research was heavily focused on vegetable production, specifically processing tomatoes for a local salsa product. The emphasis on local products motivated her to move back to Oklahoma and she is so excited to now serve the town that raised her.

