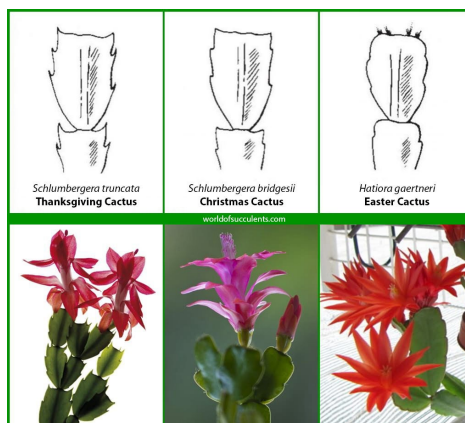




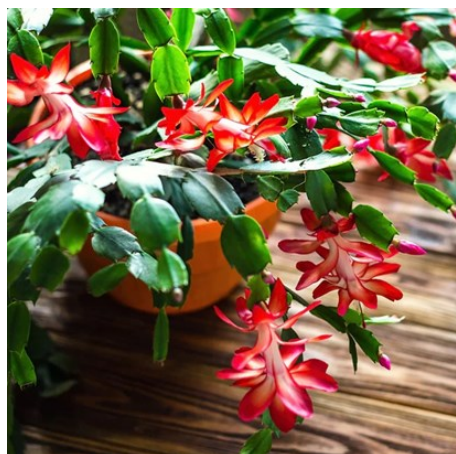
Holiday Cacti

During the holiday season, many plant stores have a wide variety of house plants and succulents to choose from. One popular houseplant is the Christmas cactus. While they are sold as “Christmas cacti,” they are sometimes a different variety. Thanksgiving cacti tend to be a hardier variety that makes it easier to ship and sell during the winter months. There are a few tricks to tell which variety of holiday cacti you are purchasing:

- **Thanksgiving Cactus:** bloom from Thanksgiving through Christmas; leaf margins have two or four saw-toothed projections pointing upward along the sides of the stem; flower color can be red, lavender, salmon-orange, and white.
- **Christmas Cactus:** bloom from Christmas through March; leaf margins have rounded scallops along the sides of the stem; flower color is usually red, pink, and white.
- **Easter Cactus:** bloom from March through May and potentially again in the fall; leaf margins are smoother than other holiday cacti with brownish bristles; flower color can be red or pink.



Holiday cacti are generally easy to care for. They prefer coarse soils with humus and sharp sand to provide adequate drainage. Keep soil moist, but do not overwater; root rot can easily occur in overwatered cacti. These plants will bloom if they are in cooler locations around the house.



For repeat flowering, cacti need to be in locations between 60 to 65 degrees, stop fertilizing, allow soil to dry between waterings, and provide 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness every night for 5 to 6 weeks.

Move plants to a well-lit area of the house once flower buds appear and resume regular watering and fertilizing. To avoid bud drop, ideal temperature is between 60 to 70 degrees.

Holiday cacti are easy to propagate by creating cuttings of stem sections. Spring and summer are ideal times for propagating.



Jessie Tisdale , Extension Agent
MSU-ES Forrest County

Phone: (601) 545-6083 E-mail: jnt207@msstate.edu

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

Forrest County
Phone: (601) 545-6083
Email: jnt207@msstate.edu

George County
Phone: (601) 947-4223
Email: h.steede@msstate.edu

Greene County
Phone: (601) 394-2702
Email: mm3583@msstate.edu

Hancock County
Phone: (228) 467-5456

Harrison County
Phone: (228) 865-4227
Email: tim.ray@msstate.edu

Jackson County
Phone: (228) 769-3047
Email: sls534@msstate.edu

Lamar County
Phone : (601) 794-3910
Email: rosso@msstate.edu

Marion County
Phone: (601) 736-8251
Email: alex.shook@msstate.edu

Pearl River County
Phone: (601) 403-2280
Email: eddie.smith@msstate.edu

Perry County
Phone: (601) 964-3668
Email: b.odum@msstate.edu

Stone County
Phone: (601) 928-5286
Email: hbj4@msstate.edu

Wayne County
Phone: (601) 735-2243
Email: crj29@msstate.edu



Eddie Smith, Ph.D., C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Pearl River County
Phone: (601) 403-2280 E-mail: eddie.smith@msstate.edu

Colorful Poinsettias

Other than Christmas trees, nothing announces the Christmas season more visually than poinsettias. If you use red ones every year in your decorations, this might be the year to branch out into something new.

During a recent visit to the Mississippi State University South Mississippi Branch Experiment Station in Poplarville, I had the opportunity to explore their poinsettia research project. This year, the station is cultivating an impressive 50 plus varieties, from traditional reds and pristine whites to a dazzling array of non-traditional colors that bring fresh excitement to holiday decor.

One standout variety, Orange Glow, enchants with its warm orange bracts, accented by coral and peach undertones. These sunlit tones are perfectly complemented by deep green foliage, making this poinsettia an eye-catching choice for modern or eclectic holiday displays.

The unique color of Orange Glow adds a cozy warmth, effortlessly standing out among more conventional holiday plants.

A personal favorite, Christmas Beauty Pink, offers a softer, more romantic approach to seasonal decorating. Its pastel pink bracts, adorned with subtle veining, create a layered, watercolor-like effect that adds to their charm. The gentle pink contrasts beautifully with the plant's rich green leaves, creating an elegant blend of colors.

This variety shines in feminine or romantic decor, whether used in table arrangements or as a standalone display piece.

One of the most unique varieties, Autumn Leaves, captures the spirit of fall with its warm, earthy tones. The bracts transition seamlessly from soft peach to rich amber, with hints of apricot and coral. The color changes in a stunning gradient reminiscent of autumn foliage.

Some bracts of Autumn Leaves have delicate pink undertones, adding depth and dimension to its appearance. This versatile variety bridges the seasons, making it a perfect choice for transitional decor.

These remarkable poinsettias are highly adaptable, complementing decorating styles ranging from classic holiday themes to bold, contemporary designs.

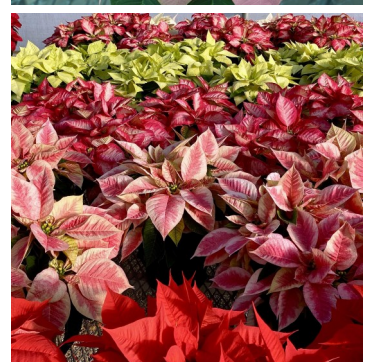
To keep your poinsettias vibrant and healthy, place them in bright, indirect sunlight for 6 to 8 hours daily, avoiding direct sunlight that can scorch their delicate bracts. Maintain a consistent indoor temperature of 65 to 75 degrees, keeping them away from cold drafts, heaters or vents to minimize stress.

Water the plant when the top inch of soil feels dry, ensuring the pot has proper drainage to prevent root rot. Always remove any excess water from decorative wraps or saucers.

As tropical plants, poinsettias thrive in moderate humidity. You can create a suitable environment by using a pebble tray or humidifier in dry indoor conditions. Handle the bracts gently, as these are prone to bruising or tearing.

For those who wish to keep poinsettias beyond the holiday season, trim the plant back in early spring, repot if necessary and move it outdoors to partial shade once temperatures remain consistently above 60 degrees.

By following these care tips, your poinsettias can remain beautiful and thriving, adding seasonal cheer to your home for weeks or even months to come.



Garden Calendar: December

Now is the time of year that Cabin Fever and garden catalogs in our mailboxes get us dreaming about getting out into the garden.

Planning

- Start plans on paper for changes or improvements in the garden.
- Order seed for early planting.

Equipment

- Repair and sharpen mowers and tools. Order new pots and markers.
- Check condition of sprayers.

Planting

- Set out trees and shrubs.
- Plant Sweet Peas, Poppies, and Larkspur.

Fertilizing

- January - March is the proper time to fertilize trees and shrubs.
- Apply lime to lawns if needed.

Pest Control

- Scale on broad-leaf evergreens should be sprayed with dormant oil for control.

Pruning

- Trim Nandinas.

Mulch

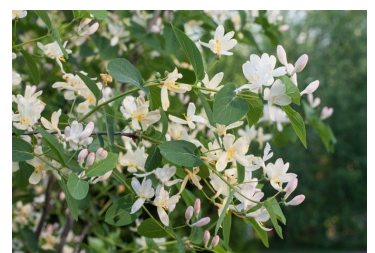
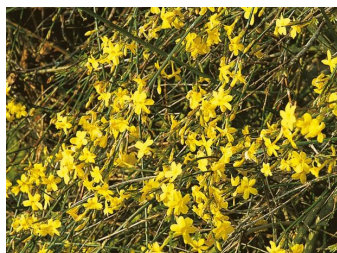
- Mulch Lilies with compost.
- Protect tender plants during periods of extreme cold.

Miscellaneous

- Keep bird feeders stocked. Provide water for birds.
- After freeze, check to make sure plants have not heaved out of the ground.

In Bloom

- Camellia, Winter Honeysuckle, Winter Jasmine, and in mild winters Flowering Quince





Tim Ray, C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent

MSU-ES Harrison County

Phone: (228) 865-4227 E-mail: tim.ray@msstate.edu

Watering Plants During the Winter

Watering plants and near freezing temperatures creates a false sense of security with many homeowners, worrying that wet soil will freeze and injure plant roots. However, supplemental watering is vital. If you do not receive a lot of rain over several weeks, your plants may need to be watered. Although your plants are dormant during the winter months, they're not dead so during dormancy they still have some basic metabolic functions that must be driven with water collected from the soil.

Cold, dry winds tend to dry out plants and since we don't see plants actively growing in the winter we may forget they need water. In addition, roots are prone to drying in the winter, causing permanent damage to perennials. By keeping plants watered and healthy, they will be better able to weather future cold snaps and will grow better once spring finally arrives.

As long as you water early in the day before the temperature drops below 40 F, the water you give your plants can actually be protective against nighttime freezes. The water in the soil acts as a trap for heat and helps the area around your plant stay a little bit warmer than the air as the night approaches. This extra heat can protect your plants from damage.

As a general rule of thumb, soak the soil to at least a depth of 6 to 8 inches. This holds true for the lawn, flowers and some trees and shrubs. This depth provides moisture to the crowns and a vast majority of the feeder roots. Trees should be soaked more deeply. Hold off fertilizing landscape plants until spring arrives. Fertilizing now will encourage new growth which is more susceptible to cold damage.

If you have an underground irrigation system, keep in mind a day or two of freezing temperatures should not harm an underground system, as the soil below is still warm and insulates the pipes. However, extended cold, winter weather will damage an underground system if not properly prepared for winter. If you need to run your irrigation system after you've prepared it for winter, be sure to properly winterize, once again, after use.



Watering your landscape plants during dry periods in the winter months can help keep plants alive and healthy.



Lawns, especially newly established lawns, should receive periodic watering during dry periods in the winter.



Merry Christmas



Brad Jones, Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Stone County
Phone: 601-928-5286 E-mail: hbj4@msstate.edu

Lawn Burweed

Lawn burweed (*Soliva pterosperma*) is more commonly known as sticker weed due to the cluster of tiny seeds with spines that stick into tender flesh of bare feet, knees, and hands, that may come in contact with them at seed maturity. Pets may also have an issue with this weed and become hesitant to go out into the yard.

Lawn burweed is best described as a low-growing, freely branched, winter annual having leaves that are twice divided into narrow segments or lobes similar to the appearance of tiny carrot leaves. The real identifier is the small rosette button fruit clusters that form down in the leaf axils once the plant reaches a reproductive stage. At maturity, usually late spring and into summer is when we endure their pain from the dried sharp spines.



Ideally, a preemergent herbicide containing dithiopyr, prodiamine, pendimethalin, or other approved product applied in late summer into early Fall will provide the best control. If you did not apply a preemergent herbicide earlier this fall to control winter annual weeds, and you had lawn burweed in your lawn last summer, then you most likely have them again now and will have to endure their painful spines for another summer each time you walk barefoot on your lawn unless you take action soon to control them. Once the fruiting clusters have formed and produced the tiny seeds and spines, killing the plants will only eliminate the existing weeds but, the tiny spines and seed will remain to inflict pain for another summer.

If you miss the preemergence timeframe, using postemergence herbicides are your next best bet. Post-emergent options will be dictated by the primary turf species found within your home lawn. Products containing atrazine provide excellent control in centipede and St. Augustine lawns, while mix products containing 2,4-D, Dicamba, and MCPP/Mecoprop will provide good control. For most southern lawns, excluding bahiagrass, metsulfuron methyl can be a viable solution.



For more products and information about turf tolerance to herbicides and more options please refer to Publication 1322 "Establish and Manage Your Home Lawn". Also, **fully read and obey all label directions and instructions** no matter which product you choose. Extension publication 1532 "Weed Control Guidelines for Mississippi" provides a list of several good post-emergent herbicide choices that will control this weed along with most other winter annual weed species, but timing is critical.



Ross Overstreet, C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Lamar County
Phone: (601) 794-3910 E-mail: r.overstreet@msstate.edu

Florida Betany (aka Rattlesnake weed)

Florida Betany, or rattlesnake weed, is a troublesome weed found in many home lawns, landscape beds, and disturbed areas in South MS. This winter perennial weed is most easily recognized by its “rattlesnake button” tuber, that is grown underground and not only gives it its common name but also its over-summering survival structure and the reason it is so difficult to easily control.

Control of this weed can be downright difficult in some instances. In home lawn situations, depending on the type of turfgrass present, an application of atrazine or atrazine+ benzonate on St. Augustine or centipede grass, through winter/early spring will help control this troublesome weed. In other turfgrasses, an application of 2,4-D + MCPP + Dicamba may provide some control. In areas other than lawns, very little can be used, as labeled options for control just aren't present. Glyphosate can be used carefully as a spot treatment in flower beds and other bare or mulched areas, taking great care to avoid application on the leaves of desirable plants.

One easy way to avoid overspray, or undesired application, is to put on a chemical resistant, rubber glove and then a cotton work glove over the rubber glove then pour a little bit of the mixed herbicide solution onto the cotton work glove taking extra precautions to avoid skin contact. At this point, you can safely rub your gloved hand across the undesirable weeds/plants in your flower beds to avoid mistakenly applying to desirable plants within the planting.

Please note some of these herbicides cannot be used on all turfgrasses and care should be taken when applying these chemicals around ornamental beds as damage may occur when applied to the rootzone of these plants.



Be sure to READ and FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS. The label is the law!

5th Annual Poinsettia Open House

Friday, December 5th
1:00PM - 4:00PM

Saturday, December 6th
9:00AM - 1:00PM

50 varieties of Poinsettias

Take our survey and take home a plant

Register below for the Evergreen Wreath Workshop offered both days from
10:00 am - Noon



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Email: scott.langlois@msstate.edu

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT
Dec. 13th	Crosby Arboretum's Second Saturday Stroll: Tree ID field walk with Dr. Andrea De Stefano 10:00—11:30 AM. Join us for a guided walk in the woods to explore some of the woody species of The Crosby Arboretum. Participants will learn how to use key traits, focusing on the most distinctive features of each plant. The walk will also introduce the basics of plant taxonomy and systematics and the importance of using scientific names for accurate identification, species' uses, and their importance in our landscape and communities. Members free; non-members \$7. *To register for this and other events at the Crosby Arboretum, visit http://www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/events-page
Dec. 17th	Private Applicator Certification Training 9:00 AM—3:00 PM. Hancock County Extension Office located at 17304 Hwy 603, Kiln, MS. \$60 per individual: Check or money order only! This certification is for applying pesticides on land owned or rented for agricultural purposes. Call 228-467-5456 to register.
Dec. 18th	Crosby Arboretum's Third Thursday Gardeners Guide Series: Tree Guild Permaculture 10:00—11:00 AM. Join Master Gardener Mona Leal and learn how to underplant a central tree in your landscape to create a mini forest garden. This practice is designed to mimic the natural tendency of wild plants to grow together for increased health, pest resistance, and productivity. \$3 Members/\$7 non-members



Tim Ray, C.A., Co. Coordinator & Extension Agent
MSU-ES Harrison County
Phone: (228) 865-4227 E-mail: tim.ray@msstate.edu

A Quick Story of My Favorite Tree, Ever!

Many of you know that I worked in the landscape industry in Oklahoma City many years ago. One Fall day a colleague told me, "I have to show you this tree!" It was an Autumn Purple ash, *Fraxinus americana* 'Junginger' trademarked as Autumn Purple. As we drove closer to it I thought, I have never seen a more spectacular tree in my life.

Autumn Purple is a male, seedless white ash. It has a Fall color that may include orange-yellow leaves underneath and deep purple or mahogany above giving it an appearance of being on fire within. The Fall color is the reason this will always be my favorite tree, ever!

That afternoon I turned up the road to my house in the neighborhood. Off in the distance I saw yet another Autumn Purple ash. As I got closer I realized that thing is in my yard!! Yep, had one and obviously looked right underneath it. I pay much closer attention nowadays.

I'd love to have another one some day. It truly is a unique, specimen tree. Unfortunately, it's not well-suited in our area because it's not storm resistant. And now, with the recent news of the Emerald Ash borer being found in Mississippi, I wouldn't want to risk dealing with that issue. Well maybe,we'll see.



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