Caring for the Cut Christmas Tree

1. Purchase a fresh tree with needles that do not fall off when shaken.
2. Recut the base of the stem and stand it in water as soon as you get it home.
3. Store the tree outdoors, standing in a bucket of water, until it is brought inside.
4. Avoid exposing the tree to heat sources and warm drafts. Use an antitranspirant spray to help slow the drying out of needles.
5. Be sure your tree stand is large enough to hold adequate water. Check the water level daily and keep the cut surface covered with water at all times. A cut Christmas tree will absorb between 2 pints and one gallon of water per day. Use plain water, no additives.
Garden Chores for November

Lawns

- Depending on the weather, you may still need to mow a time or two before putting the mower away for winter.
- A mulching mower can do a good job of chopping those fallen leaves if there are not too many. Another option is to put on the bagging attachment to chop and collect the leaves. They make a good addition to the compost pile.
- Nitrogen fertilizer can still be applied if you have not put out the fall application yet.

Ornamentals

- This is an excellent time to plant most trees and shrubs, evergreen groundcovers, and spring bulbs.
- When planting trees and shrubs, pay attention to correct planting depth. Water well and apply a 3 inch layer of mulch, being careful to pull the mulch a few inches away from the stem.
- Check landscape beds for winter annual weeds. Remove them now as they will only be larger in the spring.
- The lawn is not the only area that may need fall leaves removed. Do not allow a heavy layer of leaves to smother ground covers, evergreen perennials or pansies.
- If you have hemlock trees that need to be treated for hemlock woolly adelgid infestations, this is a good time to apply either sprays or a soil drench. For more information on hemlock woolly adelgid control, go to: http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/trees/note119/note119.html.
- Plant an amaryllis bulb. If you have a dormant one, check it regularly and begin watering as soon as the new shoot begins to emerge.

Fruits

- Finish fall cleanup – rake leaves and remove any fruit left in trees or on the ground.
- Do not prune fruit trees until March.
- Pull weeds in the strawberry bed, but do not cover the plants with straw yet.

Vegetables

- Remember to take advantage of the herb garden when preparing those holiday meals. In addition to flavoring, herbs can make lovely garnish or table decoration.
- Leafy greens can be harvested by pulling the whole plant, or by removing lower leaves and allowing the plant to continue to grow.
- Most of the winter vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli and greens, do not need protection from cold temperatures until nights fall into the low 20s.
- Remove the dead ferns from the asparagus bed.

Other

- This is an excellent time to send in your soil tests. Results come back quickly this time of year, allowing plenty of time to start making adjustments for next season’s garden.
- Drain rain barrels. Some people simply leave the tap open for the winter, others reinstall the down spout and store the barrel.
Garden Chores for December

**Lawns**
- You should be able to take a break from the lawn for a while. This would be a good time to get the mower serviced and ready for next season, though.

**Ornamentals**
- Trees and shrubs can still be planted any time the soil is not frozen or too muddy.
- Keep a living tree indoors no longer than 10 days. Then take it out and plant it in the landscape as soon as possible.
- To enjoy the poinsettia as long as possible, give it very little direct sunlight, keep it away from heat vents and cold drafts, and water regularly.
- Keep good pruning practices in mind when cutting holiday greenery. Make clean cuts at branch angles or leaf nodes, and keep an eye on the shape of the plant.

**Fruits**
- Grape vines can be pruned any time during the dormant season. Do some pruning now if you want to use vines for wreath making.
- The strawberry bed can be mulched with straw when nights are regularly falling below freezing.

**Vegetables**
- Parsnips, turnips, beets and carrots can still be dug if the soil has not frozen.
- Lettuce and Swiss chard can be kept going through much of the winter by covering with row cover fabric or constructing a cloche (mini-greenhouse) over the bed.
- Monitor greenhouses, cloches and cold frames daily. Temperatures heat up quickly on a sunny day.

**Other**
- Use some down time to clean, sharpen, oil and repair garden tools and equipment.

A Traditional Thanksgiving

We may not all be preparing a traditional Thanksgiving meal from scratch anymore, but we can often make the meal more meaningful by including items from our own gardens. Most “southern” gardens will have collards; turnips and turnip greens, and maybe cabbage. Did you make pickles this year, or jam, or can or freeze some vegetables? Don’t forget to use them.

Another option for keeping at least some of your meal “local” is to shop at one of our wonderful local tailgate markets for fresh vegetables and fruits, breads, sweets, and more. Pumpkins and squashes in all shapes and sizes can be nice additions for decorating, along with Indian corn, dried flowers, and leaves, seed pods and greenery from the landscape.
**Spotlight: American Holly**

What plant more represents the holiday season than American holly? Evergreen leaves and red berries have made this plant a tradition for winter decorating. Although we occasionally see beautiful old specimens in landscapes, it is not that often used in modern landscape designs. The most likely reason is that it grows fairly slowly and other hybrid hollies are faster and easier to grow in nurseries.

Wild holly trees are quite variable in characteristics such as leaf color and plant form. But there are reportedly more than 1,000 named cultivars of *Ilex opaca*. Many of these are selected for characteristics like dark green leaf color, heavy berry production and tree shape. If you want to be different, there are varieties with orange or yellow berries.

To ensure lots of berries a female tree must have a male tree nearby to provide pollen. In western North Carolina this is usually not a problem, especially in rural areas. If you want to be sure, though, you can purchase a male tree for your landscape as well. In the wild the trees usually do not flower, so you can tell which sex they are, until they are too large to move.

Although American holly will grow fine in partial shade, it will develop the best shape and berries in full sun. As long as soil is well drained, don’t worry much about the soil pH, as anywhere between 4.5 and 6.5 will do.

With time American holly can get pretty large—30 feet or so. Leaf miners and spring leaf drop can render the leaves unsightly for a while in the spring. Plant it at the edge of the yard where it has room to grow, and you and the birds can enjoy the winter berries, and still have a supply of holiday greenery.

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**Winter House Plant Care**

What did you do with all those house plants you brought inside for the winter? Did you take the time to hose them off, remove dead leaves, and check them over carefully for insects? If not, use one of the nice autumn days to carry them back out long enough to give them a good cleaning and inspection. If you bring in one plant with mealy bugs or mites and shove it onto the windowsill with the others, in short order they will all be infested.

Also give some consideration to where you locate each plant. Does it need direct sunlight, or indirect light? It is often difficult to find an indoor location that receives similar light to what the plant had outside. A couple of my orchids already have some scorched leaves because they were not adapted to the direct afternoon sun they are exposed to in the window.

It is also not uncommon for plants to shed a lot of leaves when moved to different light conditions. *Ficus benjamina* trees are well known for this, but some begonias, geraniums, and other plants will do it too. Don’t panic. Just pick up fallen leaves and wait for the plant to grow new ones.

You may also need to change your watering schedule. The humidity indoors in winter can be quite dry. So plants may actually need to be watered more frequently than they did during the summer. Feel the soil with your fingers every few days for a while until you figure out what the winter schedule is going to be.

Most house plants should not be fertilized during winter because they are not receiving as much light and are not growing as much. The exception would be flowering plants such as African violets, cyclamens and orchids. Since these all tend to bloom during winter, regular applications of a weak fertilizer solution (1/4 to 1/2 strength) is the usual recommendation.
Outstanding Volunteers

Extension Master Gardener Volunteers have helped thousands of Buncombe County gardeners to improve their gardening practices and to resolve plant problems. Without their time and energy many of your questions would have gone unanswered. We thank all our hard working volunteers for their dedication to urban horticultural education in Buncombe County. On November 10 our outstanding volunteers were recognized for their contributions in 2011.

2011 Volunteer of the Year award was presented to two outstanding volunteers. Kyle Gilgis and Barbara Hayes were each recognized for the numerous volunteer activities in which they have been involved as well as willingness to take on leadership of several projects.

The New Sprout award was presented to the outstanding member of the Class of 2011. Brigitte Knauf was recognized for her participation in numerous volunteer activities.

2011 Extension Master Gardener Volunteers receiving certification after completing training and more than 40 hours of service were:

Chris Amato   Joanna Amato   Carol Barley   Rose Bartlett
Laurie Bell   Nancy Bowles   Pam Drew   Mary Farmer
Charles Gershon   Ned Gardenier   Karen Herrell   Dennis Hill
Maryann Hubbard   Brigitte Knauf   Mary Koppenheffer   Beth Leonard
Frann Love   Jenni Martin   Christina Muth   Molly Peeples
Robin Stickney   Marsha Werst

Holiday Gift Suggestions

Allow us to offer a couple of suggestions for your holiday gift giving.

Rain Barrels:
Has the gardener in the family been coveting a rain barrel? Buncombe County Cooperative Extension has 80 gallon rain barrels available. Each barrel comes complete with fittings and installation instructions. Barrel are available for $110 + tax, cash or check. To purchase your barrel, come to the Buncombe County Extension Office, 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC 28801. To check availability call 255-5522. We’ll be happy to hold your barrel for holiday pick up.

New! Garden Guides:
“A Gardening Guide for Our Mountains”, is a brand new, updated version of the old Garden Almanac, with expanded information on waterwise gardening, firewise landscaping, preparing your garden for winter, growing fruits and vegetables, flower and herb gardening, composting and mulching, caring for trees and shrubs and more. The helpful monthly “To Do” list is still an essential part of the Guide. For only $10 it is a great stocking-stuffer for the gardeners in your life—or for yourself! They are also much appreciated by anyone new to western North Carolina. Pick one up at the Buncombe County extension Office, 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville for $10 (cash or check). Or have it mailed to you by sending a check for $12 (made out to BCMG Enhancement Fund) to BCMG Enhancement Fund, c/o NC Cooperative Extension Office, 94 Coxe Ave., Asheville, NC 28801. We hope to soon have them available for credit card purchase online at: http://buncombemastergardener.org
North Carolina Christmas Trees

Courtesy of the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association

http://www.NCchristmastrees.com

North Carolina produces over 19% of the real Christmas Trees in the U.S.

The North Carolina Christmas Tree industry is ranked second in the nation in number of trees harvested.


The North Carolina Fraser fir Christmas tree is the most popular Christmas tree in North America and is shipped into every state in the U.S. as well as the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, Canada, Bermuda, Japan and other points all over the world.