

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

December's Garden Checklist

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

Poinsettias are the most popular of all potted holiday plants during the Christmas season. They are available in a wide range of colors. Poinsettias can add a festive splash of color to the home decor during and after the holiday season.

I have griped too much about the reluctance of the fall season to make a sustained presence. Well, fall weather has finally arrived in the Texas Upper Gulf Coast growing area!

Typical gardening activities taper off at this time of year. Weather conditions over the last month of the year will likely provide something for everyone to like—be it pleasantly warm days or crisply cool days.

Although the winter season starts on Monday, December

21, at 10:49 p.m., some home gardeners are already harvesting broccoli and a variety of greens.

The month of December ushers in a state of dormancy for many landscape trees and shrubs. What is good for plants is oftentimes good for the gardener. The month of December offers something for every gardener to do and even enjoy. Review the following gardening checklist for December for gardening reminders and educational programs:

Master Gardener Newsletter

Online: The Galveston County Master Gardener newsletter is crammed full of useful information on Gulf Coast gardening ranging from commonly found insect pests in the garden to Master Gardeners listing their favorite landscape and vegetable plants. The November/December newsletter issue is available online (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>).

Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration Garden



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News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.

Tour: The Master Gardeners will conduct a "Garden with the Masters" program on Thursday, December 3. A guided tour of vegetable beds as well as the fruit orchard and serenity garden will start at 9:00 a.m. Visitors are also welcome to casually tour the gardens and orchard from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Applications Accepted for Master Gardener Course: Interested in becoming a Master Gardener? Applications are being accepted for the 2016 Galveston County Master Gardener Training Course which will start in February. Applications and other information are available online (<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html>). Applications must be received by the AgriLife Extension Office by Friday, December 18.

Growing Tomatoes from Seed: Seminar on Saturday, December 12, from 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbine Park (4102-B Main St., La Marque). Many serious tomato growers prefer to grow their own transplants from seeds as they have a wider selection of varieties to choose from and can have transplants ready earlier than those available at nurseries. Learn about the secrets of growing tomatoes from seeds by Master Gardener Ira Gervais.

Topics include how to pick the best varieties including heirlooms, where to obtain seeds, planting and growing techniques, and insect and disease control. A limited selection of seeds from several heirloom tomato varieties will be available free-of-charge. No fee but pre-registration required (phone 281-309-5065 or e-mail GALV3@wt.net).

Till Garden Beds: Unlike our gardening friends above the Mason-Dixon Line,

our soils don't freeze solid so we can work the garden soil and prepare beds for next spring's planting activities. When working garden soil, whether for planting flowers and shrubs or a vegetable garden, never till or work the soil when it is wet, especially soil with high clay content. Tilling wet soil tends to degrade soil structure, forming large clods that may take a long time to break down. Soil works up best when it is slightly moist, yet crumbles readily after being hand-pressed into a ball.

CONTROL OF COOL SEASON WEEDS: Yes, weeds do continue to grow during the winter season. Do not let these unwanted bullies take over your flower beds. A 3-to-4 inch layer of mulch will prevent most cool season weed seeds from sprouting. It is more effective to keep weeds under control with regular efforts than to try to correct a situation that has gotten out of control due to inattention.

POINSETTIAS: Christmas poinsettias are widely available now. Keep the potting soil evenly moist, never let the soil dry out or become soggy for long periods.

Poinsettias are often purchased with decorative foil wraps that do not allow water drainage. Be sure to take your poinsettia out of these types of decorative pots before watering. Water your poinsettia whenever the surface of the soil appears dry and the plant feels light when you lift it.

The best way to water a poinsettia is to place it in a sink and add water until it begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot. Keep the plant in the sink until all excess water has drained out of the pot and then place it back into its ornamental container.

If your poinsettia is sitting in a container with a saucer underneath, pour out

any extra water the saucer captures after watering.

