



# Horticulture

## Holiday safety

The holiday season is here. If you are like me, you are excited about the holidays and have already started or maybe finished decorating the house and yard.

Many of you put your Christmas tree up right after Thanksgiving. This year you may have decided to have a real tree. Be sure to select a fresh tree if you do. If you cut the tree yourself, you know the tree is fresh. But if you do not cut your own tree, be sure to ask when the tree was cut and check it closely for drying needles. Dry greenery and Christmas trees can be a real fire hazard this time of year in your home.

The stump of your Christmas tree should be cut fresh before placing the tree in the tree stand. Keep an adequate supply of fresh water covering this fresh cut at all times. Check the water level daily and refill when needed. The cooler you can keep the room where you have the Christmas tree, the longer it will stay in a fresh green condition. Do not place the tree near a heat duct, wood stove or fireplace.

At the first sign of needle drop and drying you should dispose of the Christmas tree. A single spark can ignite a very dry tree. Use some of the discarded

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## Cyclamen care

Cool temperatures and bright light is the prescription for success with cyclamen. Place this flowering plant in an east window. A daytime temperature of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit and a nighttime minimum temperature of 50 degrees Fahrenheit should keep it blooming well into next year.

The white, red or pink flowers grow tall with nodding stems above the rosette of heart-shaped, blue-green to dark green leaves. The foliage is marked with white veins and light green splotches.

Water the cyclamen whenever the soil begins to feel dry and try to keep the soil around the roots moist at all times. Water with lukewarm water and be careful to keep it off the foliage and crown as the plant is very susceptible to crown rot.

Fertilize the plant with a houseplant fertilizer using one-



half the recommended strength every two weeks while it is flowering. When new flowers cease to appear and the leaves turn brown, reduce the frequency and amount of watering and place the pot in a cool spot.

After flowering, let it rest until warm spring weather arrives. Repot in a mixture of equal parts houseplant potting soil and peat moss, with half the crown above the soil. Place in a sunny window or in a protected spot outdoors where it will be shaded during the brightest part of the day. (MJM)

## Houseplant problems

Living plants of various kinds are a popular addition to the decor of many homes, restaurants and other business places. Green and flowering plants serve as accents and also help soften hard architectural lines and wall surfaces. They improve quality of living.

Although less harsh in many respects, the average indoor environment presents some unique problems for normal plant growth. Light intensities in homes tend to be low, especially during fall and winter. Low light results in small leaves, pale color, long spindly stems, and flower failure. Lowered atmosphere humidity from the heating of homes causes rapid loss of moisture from plant surfaces, the soil surface and the outside surface of porous clay pots.

There are a number of other stress inducing factors that may cause problems. Most people over water their houseplants by maintaining the soil constantly wet. This can cause root rots that impair ability to replace moisture loss. A plant may outgrow the pot so that its top is out of balance with the amount of soil in which the plant is growing. Such plants quickly exhaust the supply of water present in the soil and must be watered more frequently. Constant watering sometimes compacts the soil and reduces air space, which deprives the roots of adequate oxygen. This can reduce root development and plant growth. The soil may become "channeled" so that water drains too rapidly and fails to thoroughly wet all of the soil in the container.

Determining the cause of

some house plant problems may be difficult and require skilled laboratory diagnostic procedures. Other problems are relatively simple to diagnose. Described below are some of the more common disorders and diseases, their possible causes and suggested corrective measures.

Leaf spots are quite variable in appearance, depending upon the cause. Spots caused by injury from direct sunlight on shade requiring plants usually are large with regular margins. Each spot may involve the entire portion of the exposed leaf. The injured area appears bleached, gradually turning tan to brown and eventually collapsing. Leaf spots resulting from chemical injury or exposure to temperature change due to droplets of cold water usually are smaller. They generally are yellowish at first with regular margins conforming with the shape and size of the drops of chemical solution or water that caused the injury. A number of leaf spot diseases are caused by fungi and bacteria. Symptoms usually are small, water soaked spots, gradually enlarging and turning brown. There also may be considerable yellowing around the margins of the spots. These diseases rarely develop under the dry atmospheric conditions prevalent in most houses. They are most common on plants recently brought into the state from southern propagating areas.

Leaf spots occasionally develop in the vicinity of feeding injury caused by sap sucking insects, such as aphids, scale and mealybug. Plant surfaces in the vicinity of these insects often are covered by a



glistening, sticky honeydew. To control leaf spot you can: remove and destroy affected leaves, avoid sprinkling water on the foliage, provide adequate air circulation. If insects are involved, correctly identify the pest causing the problem. Control sap-sucking insects by washing leaves, petioles and stems with a damp cloth or treating with a commercially prepared pyrethrin spray for house plants. Rubbing alcohol also may be applied to insects, such as mealybugs, with cotton swabs. Systemic insecticides will also control sucking insects.

Yellowing leaves is often caused by nutrient deficiency, especially nitrogen, but also may occur as a result of a sudden reduction of light intensity. Dieffenbachia, dracena and rubber plant are especially susceptible, as are larger pot-bound specimens of other plants.

Applications of nitrogen fertilizer may reverse the development of this condition when yellowing has just started. Be cautious about fertilizing plants during the winter months. Plants growing under low light intensities easily are injured by

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## 1999 December/January Garden Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3 Check bird feeders	4
5	6	7	8 Check stored fruits and vegetables for signs of rot	9 Update garden journal	10	11
12	13 Order seed catalogs	14	15 Check landscape plants for snow or wildlife damage	16	17	18
19	20	21	22 Make list of garden supplies needed for next year	23	24	25
26	27	28 Have Christmas tree recycled for mulch	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6 Avoid walking on frozen lawn	7	8
9	10 Review last years garden journal	11	12 Check stored vegetables for signs of rot	13 Make garden plan	14 Make list of seeds needed	15
16	17 Check landscape plants for snow damage	18	19 Check bird feeders	20	21 Check amaryllis bulb	22
23	24	25 Check houseplants for insects	26 check plants for rodent, rabbit or deer damage	27	28 Order seeds	29
30	30					

Many of us need reminders. That is the purpose of this calendar. Check the calendar each month and follow the recommendations if they are necessary in your landscape situation. (MJM)

### Horticulture information center

NUFACTS  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
1-800-832-5441; or  
441-7188 in the Lincoln area



To listen to a NUFACTS information center message, call the number above on a touch-tone phone, then enter a three-digit number listed below. Call 441-7180 to receive a brochure with all the NUFACTS message topics. (MJM)

- 110 Good City Trees
- 117 Tree Snow Damage
- 124 Wood for Fireplace
- 137 Deicing Salt Injury
- 139 Rabbit Damage to Plants
- 210 Amaryllis
- 212 Swedish Ivy
- 213 Prayer Plant
- 214 Houseplant Insects
- 215 Cyclamens
- 217 Boston Fern
- 218 African Violet Care
- 222 Winter Houseplant