

WINTER 2024 EDITION

# HORTICULTURE HAPPENINGS NEWSLETTER

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## Kristin's Comments



Happy Gardening!

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Welcome to the Winter 2024 Edition of the Horticulture Happenings Newsletter, your go-to source for all things horticulture! Here's a quick preview of what you'll find in this edition:

- Holiday cacti, known for their ease of care, may be a great addition to your plant collection! Our comprehensive care instructions on pages 2 and 3 will equip you with the knowledge and skills to nurture these beautiful plants.
- Mark your calendars for our upcoming Sowing Native Seeds Workshop at the Warren County Extension Office on Monday, December 2nd! For full details about this workshop, led by the Warren County Extension Master Gardeners, see page 4 of the newsletter.
- Winter is an excellent time to carry out several essential gardening activities before the busy spring season begins! Check out the monthly calendars: December's recommendations are on page 5, and January's are on page 6.
- The Warren County Extension Office is thrilled to announce the return of the Warren County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program for 2025! We can't wait to have you join us. For more information about this program and instructions on registering, please refer to page 7.
- Start your day on a delicious note with Plan Eat Move's Country Morning Casserole recipe! The full recipe is featured on the back of the newsletter, ready to inspire your culinary adventures.



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## Caring for Holiday Cacti

SOURCE: CLEMSON EXTENSION FACTSHEET HGIC 1554

Thanksgiving cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) and Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) are popular, fall- and winter-flowering houseplants native to Brazil, and are available in a wide variety of colors including red, rose, purple, lavender, peach, orange, cream, and white. These *Schlumbergera* species grow as epiphytes among tree branches in shady rain forests, and their pendulous stems make them a great choice for hanging baskets.

When grown under normal night length conditions, Thanksgiving cacti normally flower near Thanksgiving approximately a month before Christmas cacti bloom. Another member of the group sold as holiday cacti is the Easter cactus (*Hatiora gaertneri*; synonym *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*), which flowers primarily in the spring and sporadically throughout the year with pink or red flowers. Because of its bloom time, the Thanksgiving cactus is most predominately encountered for sale during the winter holiday season. Flowering can last up 7 to 8 weeks if the plants are kept at 68 °F.

To distinguish between the Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti, look at the shape of the flattened stem segments, which are botanically called phylloclades. On the Thanksgiving cactus, these stem segments each have 2 to 4 saw-toothed serrations or projections along the margins. The stem margins on the Christmas cactus are more rounded. Note that there are no true leaves on either of these holiday cacti, so photosynthesis occurs within the green phylloclades.

A second method to distinguish between these two *Schlumbergera* species is based on the color of the pollen bearing anthers. The anthers of the Thanksgiving cactus are yellow, whereas the anthers on the Christmas cactus are purplish-brown.

### Culture

**Light & Temperature:** The holiday cacti grow best in light shade. Full sunlight is beneficial during fall and winter, but bright sun during the summer months can make plants look pale and yellow. Ideal spring and summer growth occurs at temperatures between 70 to 80 °F during its growing season from April to September. During the fall, the Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti depend upon shorter day lengths (8 to 10 hours) and cooler temperatures to set their flower buds. Do not let temperatures rise above 90 °F once the flower buds are set in the fall. Continuous warm temperatures can cause flower buds to drop. Do not leave these cacti outside if temperatures will drop below 50 °F.

**Quick Tip:**  
During the fall, the Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti depend on shorter day lengths (8 to 10 hours) and cooler temperatures to set their flower buds.





## Caring for Holiday Cacti

SOURCE: CLEMSON EXTENSION FACTSHEET HGIC 1554

The secret of good flower bud production during the fall involves temperature regulation and photoperiod (length of day and night) control. To initiate flower buds the plants need:

- Bright light.
- Long nights. Fourteen hours or more of continuous darkness each day is required before flower bud set will occur. Long nights should be started about the middle of September and continued for at least 6 continuous weeks for complete bud set. Note that as little as 2 hours of interrupted lighting will inhibit flower bud set. Buds normally will be visible in 3 to 4 weeks. The photoperiod has no effect on flowering once the buds are set.
- Fall growing temperatures should be kept between 60 and 68 °F, but as close to 68 °F as possible for maximum flower production. Plants grown with night temperatures between 50 and 59 °F will set flower buds regardless of day length, but growth will be slower and bud drop may occur at 50 °F.
- Pinching back the stems in early June to promote branching and more terminals for more flowers.
- Pinching (also called leveling) at the end of September to remove any terminal phylloclades that are less than 1 cm (0.4 inch) long and to make all stems approximately the same length. These short and immature stem segments will not initiate flower buds until mature. After a short phylloclade is removed, a flower bud forms on the previous, more mature stem segment.

**Watering & Fertilizer:** Water the growing medium when it is dry to the touch. The holiday cacti are tolerant of dry, slightly under-watered conditions during the spring and summer. Do not let the soil become waterlogged, especially during the dark days of winter, but do not let the soil completely dry out either. However, following bud set in the fall, the growing medium must be kept evenly moist to prevent flower bud abscission. Never let water stand in the saucer beneath the pot.

Fertilize plants monthly from the time new growth starts in late winter or early spring, and throughout the summer using a one-half strength soluble fertilizer, such as a 20-10-20 or 20-20-20 with trace elements. Holiday cacti have a higher requirement for magnesium than many plants. Fertilize monthly during the growing season with Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) mixed at 1 teaspoon per gallon of water, but do not apply the same week as the regular fertilizer. Stop fertilization during the late summer for greater flower bud production in the fall.

To read more information about caring for holiday cacti, check out the QR code below.





## Sowing Native Seeds Workshop

The Warren County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, a group of experienced and passionate gardeners, will host a Sowing Native Seeds Workshop on Monday, December 2, 2024, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Warren County Extension Office located at 5162 Russellville Road in Bowling Green, KY 42101.

In this practical program, Extension Master Gardeners will share information about native seed stratification methods and then conduct a hands-on workshop. Participants will learn and practice what they have learned, gaining the skills to winter sow native seeds using a recycled gallon jug container. This method allows seeds to start early in a miniature DIY greenhouse, producing hardy winter-sown seedlings that are easy to transplant in the spring after frost.

Please register by contacting the Warren County Extension Office at 270-842-1681 so we can plan for materials to make one seed-starting container with the native species of your choice. The available native species are:

- Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
- Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
- Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnate*)
- Showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)
- Hollow-Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium fistulosum*)
- Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*)
- Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccifolium* L)
- Foxglove Beardstongue (*Penstemon digitalis*) and more.

Many seeds have been harvested from the Warren County Extension Master Gardeners Certified Monarch Waystation.

If you attend, please bring a clean half-gallon milk jug to the workshop to start your native seeds.

To register for this upcoming workshop, use the QR code listed below:







## December Garden Calendar

SOURCE: MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

### Trees & Shrubs

- Continue watering trees and shrubs, especially evergreens, until the ground freezes.
- Roses should be overwintered after a heavy frost. Place a 6-10 inch layer of mulch over the plant. Prune sparingly, just enough to shorten overly long canes. Climbing roses should not be pruned.
- Apply mulch as a “donut” around trees instead of “volcano” mulching, which can cause plant damage such as root girdling.
- A male tree must be nearby for pollination and fruit production for berries on a holly tree.
- Branches of apples, pears, and other rose family plants infected with fire blight can be safely pruned off now.
- Be sure the root zones of shrubs are thoroughly mulched. Any organic material will do.
- Live Christmas trees hold needles longer when you make a clean, fresh cut at the base, and always keep the trunk standing in water.
- Hollies may be trimmed now. The cuttings can be used in holiday decorations.

### Houseplants

- During the winter, houseplants typically need less water than in the summer due to reduced hours of sunlight. Err caution and use tepid water instead of cold water. Overly wet soils can lead to increased numbers of fungus gnats that lay eggs in the damp soil.
- When purchasing houseplants in winter, protect the foliage from the cold on the trip home. Place plants in a cardboard box or protective covering to prevent leaf damage.
- Move houseplants back from icy windows to prevent chilling injury.
- Holiday poinsettias do best with bright, indirect light and night temperatures in the 50-60’s. Let the soil dry out slightly between thorough waterings. Ensure the water can drain and evaporate; punch holes in the decorative foil if needed.

### Miscellaneous

- Be proactive and check if any seeds purchased for the next season require stratification to germinate. The seed packet should indicate if this process is needed. Some common seeds that require stratification include milkweed, coneflower, black-eyed Susans, and others.







# January Garden Calendar

SOURCE: MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

## Houseplants

- To clean heavily encrusted clay pots, scrub them with a steel wool pad after soaking them overnight in a solution of 16:1 water and white vinegar.
- Keep houseplant foliage dust-free. This will allow the leaves to get the most light possible.
- Humidity levels are usually lower in the winter. To ensure that houseplants receive adequate humidity, provide pebble trays, place houseplants near each other, or use a humidifier.
- Be sure to quarantine new houseplants and inspect carefully for pests.
- After the amaryllis has bloomed, remove spent flowers and set the plant in a sunny window to allow the leaves to develop fully. Keep the soil moist and fertilize occasionally with a general-purpose houseplant fertilizer.

## Trees & Shrubs & Ornamentals

- Allow ice to naturally melt off as it can cause branches to break easily. Prune off broken or damaged branches promptly to prevent the bark from tearing.
- Check fruit trees for evidence of rodent injury to bark. Use baits or traps where necessary.
- Avoid foot traffic on frozen lawns as this may injure turf grass.

## Miscellaneous

- Use sand, birdseed, sawdust, or vermiculite to gain traction on icy paths. Avoid salt or chemical ice melt, as these may injure plants.
- Monitor overwintering dormant plants and tubers to ensure they are not completely dried out or rotting.
- Look for seed and nursery catalogs. Now is an excellent time to start planning this year's garden.
- Now is a great time to start a garden journal. Please write down your current plants, their performance, and what you plan on growing this year. Resolve to keep records of your garden this year.
- Swap seeds and plant information with fellow gardening friends.
- Make tools easier to spot by applying brightly colored paint or tape to the handles.





# Simpson & Warren County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program



Cooperative  
Extension Service



Kentucky Extension  
Master Gardener

Every Thursday

**10:00 AM - 1:00 PM**

*lunch will be served*

**February 6th-April 24th**

*\*Make up dates to be held  
May 1st and 8th.*

**Warren County Extension Office  
5162 Russellville Rd  
Bowling Green**

**\$175  
per person**  
Covers all meals &  
materials for entire  
course

## Subjects include:

- Basic Botany
- Soils & Fertility
- Plant Propagation
- Vegetable Gardening
- Pesticide & Composting
- Plant Pathology
- Home Lawn Care
- Entomology
- Small & Tree Fruits
- Woody Ornamentals
- Annual & Perennial Flowers



**RSVP  
270-842-1681**

*Kristin G. Hildabrand*

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Warren County Extension Agent  
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# Country Morning Casserole

SOURCE: PLAN EAT MOVE!

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups whole-wheat bread, cut into cubes
- 1 cup shredded low-fat cheddar cheese
- 6 eggs
- 1 cup skim milk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup frozen broccoli florets
- ½ bell pepper, roughly chopped
- ½ onion, chopped

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a 7-by-11-inch or 9-by-9-inch pan, layer bread cubes and shredded cheddar.
3. Mix eggs, milk, salt, garlic powder, pepper, and vegetables in a medium bowl. Pour over bread.
4. Bake for approximately one hour (check periodically) or until eggs have set.

Nutritional Analysis: 120 calories; 5g total fat; 2g saturated fat; 0g trans fat; 170mg cholesterol; 400mg sodium; 9g carbohydrate; 1g fiber; 3g sugar; 0g added sugar; 12g protein; 0% Daily Value of vitamin D; 10% Daily Value of calcium; 6% Daily Value of iron; 4% Daily Value of potassium



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