



Dougherty County Horticulture Depot

Special Holiday Edition

JAMES MORGAN, editor



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Cut Your Own Christmas Tree To Keep The Holidays Fresh

By April Sorrow University of Georgia

Many Georgians remember hiking into nearby woods as children to chop down that most iconic of all holiday decorations: the family Christmas tree. These days, a suitable one is less likely to be found in the backyard; but the experience can still be found, along with that perfect tree, among the acreage at a choose-and-cut tree farm.

“It’s all about the experience,” said Liza Smith, owner of 7 G’s Farm in Nicholson, Ga. “Families come out here and find their perfect Christmas tree together. It is really amazing to watch the excitement in children.”

Given a saw and direction, shoppers navigate the farm. Along with spotting deer frolicking among the trees or enjoying a chance encounter with Santa, visitors take home more than just a tree.



“We describe it as an oxygen-enriched atmosphere,” said Greg Smith, the farm’s manager. “One acre of Christmas trees provides enough oxygen for 18 people.” With over 6,000 trees, the air at 7 G’s Farm is rich. The farm sells Leyland Cypress ranging from 5 feet to 13 feet tall for \$6 a foot. Last year, they sold nearly 1,000 trees.

“Our business is growing every year,” Smith said. “But, we saw people opting for smaller, more modest trees last year, probably in response to the economy.”

Christmas tree farming in Georgia brought more than \$8.5 million to the state’s economy last year, according to the annual Georgia Farm Gate Value Report from the University of Georgia Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development. Most Georgia tree farms offer Cypress varieties, but some offer Virginia Pine, White Pine or Red Cedar trees, too. Choose-and-cut farms are the perfect place to purchase the freshest tree possible.

“Fresh trees can last from the first of November through Christmas, if you keep it supplied with water,” said David Moorhead, an extension specialist with the UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

A six-foot tree can take up to a gallon of water a day, Moorhead said. “Fill the tree stand when you bring it in and check it twice a day,” he said. “If you let the tree dry out, the base will seal up and it will be difficult to get any water into the tree.”

Dry trees can be a fire hazard. Keeping an adequate water supply flowing to the tree is paramount. Keep trees away from heat sources such as vents or fireplaces to help prevent drying.

Trees cut and shipped to retail outlets for the holiday season are typically grown in states further north or west of Georgia. Many spend weeks without water. To test for freshness, shake the tree vigorously before buying it. If a shower of needles falls, move on. “If it looks wilted, select a fresher tree,” Moorhead said. “If it doesn’t look good when you buy it, it won’t resurrect itself at your house.”

Regardless of where you buy your Christmas tree, cut half an inch off the bottom before placing it into a tree stand. Giving the tree a fresh cut will help it take up as much water as it can and stay fresher longer.

Keep your ceiling height in mind when selecting a tree. Be sure to get a tree that will fit in your house. If you have an eight-foot ceiling, a seven-foot tree is about as large as you can fit. “There is nothing worse than getting a perfect tree home and realizing it won’t fit,” Moorhead said. “Hacking off the bottom of the tree to make it fit is not a good idea.”

For a list of Georgia’s choose and cut Christmas tree farms visit www.gacta.com/pdf/choose_cut_big.php.

Holiday Plants Best For Looking Pretty, Not Eating

By Stephanie Schupska, UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

University of Georgia horticulturalist Paul Thomas can't think of any common gift plants that are necessarily poisonous -- most of the poisonous plants are those cut for Christmas decorations. He can, however, think of one that will light a child's or pet's mouth on fire.

Ornamental peppers sold around the holidays come in merry white and Christmas red. And these, he said, are usually bred from some of the hottest peppers on the market. "They can be, and often are, flaming, wish-you-were-dead hot," Thomas said.

Peppers can add interest to a table or garden area. But, anyone who has children should purchase them with caution.

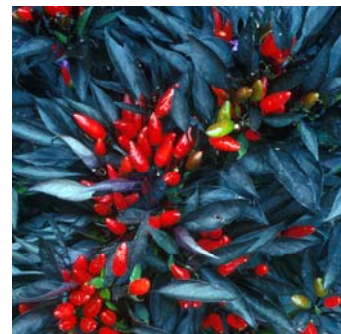
"Keep in mind, if you decided to go with ornamental peppers, that they're not going to kill a child, but you're going to have a very unhappy baby or child if they eat them," Thomas said. "They're not going to understand they bit into a hot pepper. They're just going to panic."

The best solution, as with any plant, is to keep them out of the reach of children.

Parents and others who may have children over for the holidays should watch out for a few plants commonly used as decoration that are poisonous. These include amaryllis, calla lilies, English ivy, mistletoe, holly, juniper, lantana and yew, according to the UGA Extension publication "Poisonous Plants in the Landscape" pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubs/PDF/C957.pdf

Poisonous parts include:

- Amaryllis – the bulbs and seeds
- Calla lily – all parts
- English ivy – leaves, stem and fruit
- Holly – berries
- Juniper – berry-like seeds
- Lantana – fruit
- Mistletoe – berries
- Yew – berries and foliage



"The term poisonous does not imply that the plant is fatal," said Gary Wade, a UGA Extension horticulturist. "Some plants may be only mildly toxic and may cause stomach ache or mild irritation of the mouth and throat when ingested."

Prevention is the best medicine when it comes to poison, he said. Keep an eye on what children, especially babies, are chewing on, and keep them away from plants.

In case of a poison emergency or to get poison information, always keep the Georgia Poison Center number near your telephone. Contact them at (800)222-1222 or (404)616-9000, or visit their Web site at www.georgiapoisoncenter.org .

If a poisoning occurs and the person is having trouble breathing, experiencing seizures or won't wake up, call 9-1-1 immediately.



"Poinsettias, despite their reputation, aren't poisonous," Thomas said. "They won't even make a cat, dog or a child sick if they do eat a leaf or get sap on their skin".

Some people will itch when they come in contact with poinsettias. This is because they're having an allergic reaction to the latex found in the plants. Poinsettia sap can be irritating if it gets in the eyes or on sensitive skin. If this happens, wash the affected area immediately with water.

Plants Liven Up The Holidays

By Stephanie Schupska, UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Flowers are University of Georgia horticulturist Paul Thomas's specialty. And, for holiday plant suggestions, they're his top pick. But when asked, "What was the best plant you've ever gotten for Christmas?" his answer is: "A Ming Aralia that I got from my mother-in-law. It's strictly a foliage plant, and it looks like a bonsai. It's really awesome."



Ming aralias, specifically *Polyscias fruticosa* 'elegans', have carrot-like foliage and woody stems as they get older. A ming aralia was "the plant for kings and queens to have," he said. "It grows slowly and beautifully."

While they are beautiful and do make good gifts, they're also a challenge, he said. The biggest danger is overwatering and over-fertilizing. They only need a tiny bit of diluted fertilizer every few months.

When it comes to buying gift plants, the best place to purchase them is at a local florist's shop. "They have the best quality, and they're grown by specialists for the highest quality," he said.

Thomas likes to give flowering plants as gifts. A deep basket filled with a few pots of colored calla lilies or a basket with a cluster of cyclamen topped with white or silver grass "makes a stunning gift," he said.

For gift giving, Thomas suggests:

- **Calceolaria.** The flowers look like a pocketbook, which gives it its common name of 'pocketbook plant.' "It's just cool and unusual," he said. Flower colors range from yellow to bright red with polka dots. The flowers are delicate, so handle it carefully.



The plants must be kept moist but not flooded with water. They like sunny windowsills that are cool but not freezing. There, they'll last about a month. They can't be saved and planted outside in Georgia, because they will die of plant diseases.



- **Cinerarias.** These plants look like daisies, but their colors are more intense, or, as Thomas puts it, they have "five times the impact" of daisy flowers. The blossom colors range from purple to yellow.

Like calceolaria, they need sunlight and water. "Don't let either of these plants dry out ever," he said. "I put them on my coffee table during the day and on the windowsill at night." They will live about six weeks.

- **Cyclamen.** These plants bloom white, pink or bright red. They can be found in grocery stores, aren't expensive and are a great substitute for poinsettias if someone is allergic to latex, which is found in poinsettia plants. Kept cool and moist, cyclamen blooms will last three to four months. "Buy five or six plants and put them in a big basket with white or silver grass, like the kind they sell at Easter," Thomas said. "It makes a really nice Christmas gift."

They're also a good gift plant if the holiday you celebrate isn't Christmas. Because they are native in Israel, they are a good choice as a Hanukkah plant, he said.





• **Miniature roses.** These tiny blooming beauties can do double duty as both a holiday plant and a garden attraction come spring. They prefer cool spots inside until all chance of frost has passed. Then plant them near the foundation or in another protected area of the yard.

• **Calla lilies.** "Normally, people would buy bouquets of calla lilies, but sometimes florists will sell calla lily bulbs in pots", Thomas said. When growing calla lilies, their bulbs should be kept moist and their flowers dry. The stems also need to be staked so they won't fall over and break. "Three to four pots in a deep basket are a really nice gift," he said. "They'll last a long time."



Before visiting a local florist, give them a call, Thomas said, especially if you have one type of plant you might want to give to several different people. "Get your orders in now to get the best quality for the Christmas season," he said.

WORD SEARCH WORDS were taken from the UGA publication #L-234:
CARE OF HOLIDAY & GIFT PLANTS

T O R R S L B K U J C Y S A Z O B C A T
 E D R P E U J M G A C U V Z T X C J Z E
 C H R C M P U M L O T U L A R V A O V L
 E X J Q H I P L P C U R I L D J M A N O
 G O H S N I A E A O J F E E X G A M A I
 Y Y H A E L D C P O I K M A Y L R N B V
 R F R C I R Y S J S U N V E D V Y C N N
 O E U L N A Y T P O A A S P F T L T E A
 G S Y A D A E G H O Z M N E K Q L Q M C
 F U N I V K L G N Z Q W T Y T G I Q A I
 P S L A E G N A R D Y H D S H T S Y L R
 D O R W Y Z Z B K Q G L O X I N I A C F
 H C H R Y S A N T H E M U M X R D A Y A
 R X K D L H E I M O N H D M O S H I C X
 N M I X O H L L O X D Z N L G P V C G V

- AFRICAN VIOLET
- AMARYLLIS
- AZALEA
- CALLA LILY
- CHRISTMAS PEPPER
- CHRYSANTHEMUM
- CYCLAMEN
- GERANIUM
- GLOXINIA
- HOLIDAY CACTUS
- HYDRANGEA
- KALANCHOE
- ORCHIDS
- POINSETTIA

All of this information is available through your local Extension Office. In Georgia, call 1-800-ASK-UGA1. In Dougherty County, you can reach us at 229-436-7216; our Horticulture Agent is James Morgan.

We want to wish all of you the healthiest and safest of Holiday Seasons!
Your Dougherty County Extension Staff



MASTER GARDENER PRESS RELEASE...

The Dougherty County Extension office is looking for interested candidates who would like the opportunity to become **Master Gardeners** and serve their communities along with other garden enthusiasts. Training for certification as a Master Gardener is offered through the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Office in Dougherty County.

The Master Gardener program is designed to train volunteers to become highly skilled individuals in the area of horticulture. The individual agrees to volunteer a minimum of 50 hours within a year following the completion of training, in exchange for 40 hours of horticultural training by Extension professionals. Activities in the volunteer program may include, but are not limited to, environmental gardening and composting demonstrations, plant clinics, newsletters, news articles, community gardens, beautification projects, civic or garden club presentations, children programs, homeowner visits and phone consultation from home or the Extension Office and information booths at fairs and festivals.

The cost of the program is \$135.00, which includes a Master Gardener textbook, a name badge, one-year membership in the Georgia Master Gardener Association, and all other class materials.

Classes will be every Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., beginning February 16, 2010, and concluding on April 22, 2010 at the Dougherty County Extension office located at 125 Pine Ave. There will also be four Wednesdays set aside for field trips and homeowner site visits during this time (Dates to be announced on the first day of class).







Topics of discussion range from landscape design, turf management, organic gardening to basic entomology, weed science id, diseases and insects of ornamentals and vegetables and chemical pest control.

If you feel that this program is of interest to you, please contact your local county extension office to obtain an application and a Memorandum of Agreement. Please complete the packet and mail it to the address at the top of the application no later than **5:00 p.m. on January 15, 2010**. Once your application is received and you have been notified of your acceptance into the program, a check for \$ 135.00, payable to *Dougherty County 4-H* should be mailed to the Dougherty County Extension office for training supplies.

For more information or questions regarding the upcoming Master Gardener Program in Dougherty County, please contact James Morgan at (229) 436-7216 or morganjl@uga.edu .

**Our office will close at 5:00 p.m. on December 24, 2009 for the Holidays
- We will reopen at 8:00 am on Monday, January 4, 2010.**



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
DECEMBER		1	2 Full Moon ○	3	4	5
6	7 Pearl Harbor Day 	8	9 Last Quarter ◐	10	11	12 Hanukkah 
13	14	15	16 New Moon ●	17	18	19
20	21 Winter begins 	22	23	24 First Quarter ◑	25 Christmas 	26 Kwanzaa begins 
27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve Full Moon ○	Turquoise  Narcissus 