

THE GRAPEVINE

Larry Crouse

Extension Horticulture Agent

POINSETTIA CARE

Modern poinsettia varieties stay attractive for a long time if given proper care. Place your poinsettia in a sunny window or the brightest area of the room, but don't let it touch cold windowpanes. The day temperature should be 65 to 75 degrees F with 60 to 65 degrees at night. Temperatures above 75 degrees will shorten bloom life, and below 60 degrees may cause root rot. Move plants away from drafty windows at night or draw drapes between them to avoid damage from the cold. Poinsettias are somewhat finicky in regard to soil moisture. Avoid overwatering because poinsettias do not like "wet feet." On the other hand, if the plant is allowed to wilt, it will drop leaves. So how do you maintain proper moisture? Examine the potting soil daily by sticking your finger about one inch deep into the soil. If it is dry to this depth, the plant needs water. When it becomes dry to the touch, water the plant with lukewarm water until some water runs out of the drainage hole, then discard the drainage water.

Mouse Damage to Fruit Trees/Plants

Be on the lookout for mouse tunnels around your fruit plants. Trunks and roots of apple trees are among the favorite meals for mice. There is probably no damage yet. But if we receive enough snow to cover winter food supplies, mice will begin to feed on the lower area of tree trunks and roots. This feeding may be severe enough to girdle tree trunks and kill the trees.

Mice like to hide in dead grass and weeds around the trees, especially close to the trunks. They will often tunnel near the soil surface and feed on the tree bark. You can check for mice by placing baited mouse traps in PVC or other pipe near your trees. Insert the traps far enough so that pets are unable to reach the trap. Check the stations about once a week and reset traps if necessary. Mouse damage can be severe enough to kill trees that are old enough to bear fruit. Clear dead grass and weeds away from your trees and monitor for mice if you are using mulch around your fruit plants.

Controlling Volunteer Trees

Though trees are a vital part of our landscapes, there are situations where volunteer trees need to be controlled. This is often a case of the wrong plant in the wrong place. If the tree is still small and a desirable species, you may want to consider transplanting in the spring. If it is not, active control measures would be in order. Most trees re-sprout after cutting though some don't. Cutting those that don't resprout is an effective control method. For example, eastern redcedar is a very common species that will not resprout after cutting. Those that do resprout include Siberian elm, hackberry, Osage orange (hedgeball), oak, ash, aspen, cottonwood, maple, sycamore, willow and many more. These trees will either need to be dug out or the cut stump treated with herbicide after cutting. Note that when we say volunteer trees, we mean those that come from seed rather than suckers that originate from the roots of an existing tree. The recommendations given in the remainder of this article are designed to kill these volunteer trees. Using herbicides on suckers will damage and very possibly kill the original tree. Trees that commonly produce suckers include tree of heaven, honeylocust, black locust, hackberry, western soapberry, cottonwood, aspen, poplar, willow, boxelder and persimmon. It is also possible for larger trees of the same species to be root-grafted. Even though root-grafted trees are not suckers, they do share materials between the individual root systems and therefore herbicides used to treat one tree can be passed to its neighbor. Let's say we have a tree we want to control that is a volunteer and there are no other trees of the same species close enough to be root-grafted that we do not wish to harm. What do we do? If the tree is any size, you probably do not want to dig it out. That leaves using a herbicide on the cut stump. Basal treatments are also possible but that is beyond the scope of this article. First decide what herbicide to use. Triclopyr and glyphosate are the herbicides most commonly available to homeowners. Triclopyr is found in many brush killers and glyphosate is found in Roundup as well as numerous other products. Read the label before purchasing to make sure that a cut stump treatment is listed. Most often the undiluted product is applied to the stump immediately after cutting. A paint brush is often used for the application though some people will dip their pruning shears in the products immediately before cutting. Regardless, it is important that the stump is treated immediately or at least within 5 minutes. Note that a paint brush with foam rather than bristles is less likely to drip. Trees do not need to be actively growing to be controlled. Actually this time of year is a very good time to treat as long as applications are made when the temperature is above freezing.

Using Old Garden Seed

Garden catalogs seem to come earlier each year. Since new seed can be expensive, you may want to consider using seed bought in previous years. We normally consider seed will remain viable for about 3 years under cool, dark, dry, conditions though there are exceptions. For example, members of the carrot family (carrots, parsnips and parsley) are short-lived and are usually good for only 1 to 2 years. If you are unsure of viability and have plenty of seed, there is an easy method of determining how good your seed is. Place 10 seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water and cover with a second moistened towel. Roll up the towels and place inside a plastic bag with enough holes for air exchange but not so many that the towels dry quickly. Place the bag in a warm place such as the top of a refrigerator. Remoisten towels with warm water as needed. After the first week, check for germination. Remove sprouted seed and check after another week. Add these numbers together to determine the percent germination.

What is the “Wild” Shrub with the Bright Red Berries?

People in the eastern third of the state have been reporting shrubs with bright red berries growing wild. The berries are clustered around the stem and the leaves are still a bright green color. These are likely one of two species of bush honeysuckle, (Amur or Tartarian), which can get 6-20 feet tall. This landscape shrub has become a serious understory invasive throughout the Midwest from eastern Kansas to Ohio. Many states have it on their noxious weeds list. All of our native honeysuckles are vines, similar to the vining Japanese honeysuckle. Bush honeysuckles are also noticeable in the spring as they put out leaves much earlier than most other trees and shrubs. Leaves also stay green much later into the fall. This long growing season gives it a competitive advantage over other native species, and the vigorous growth can take over a woodland understory, reducing the number of native woodland wildflowers and other shrubs. If you want to promote native species on your property, then controlling bush honeysuckles is needed. Honeysuckle seedlings can be readily hand pulled when the soil is damp. Chemical control is needed for larger infestations, as cutting alone results in vigorous resprouting. Foliar applications of glyphosate (i.e., Roundup) in late summer and fall works well as does applications of Crossbow (2,4-D + triclopyr). Treating cut stumps with Tordon RTU (picloram), or concentrated (20% - 50%) glyphosate is also quite effective. Several studies have shown basal spraying with triclopyr (Garlon) not to be effective, while basal applications with 2,4-D or picloram products work well, using an oil carrier to penetrate the bark. Cut stump and basal treatments can be done when the areas to be sprayed are dry and not frozen. Please follow all label instructions when using pesticides.