

Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Office  
206 N. Griffith, Suite A  
El Dorado, Kansas 67042

## THE GRAPEVINE

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Larry Crouse  
Extension Horticulture Agent

### CARE OF CHRISTMAS AND THANKSGIVING CACTI

Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) are epiphytes native to the jungles of South America. Epiphytic plants grow on other plants and use them for support but not for nutrients. Though these cacti are different species, they will hybridize and produce varying stem shapes. Christmas cactus normally has smooth stem segments, and Thanksgiving Cactus has hook-like appendages on each segment. Both of these cacti prefer bright indirect light. Too much sun can result in the leaves turning yellow. Common household temperatures are fine. Soil should be kept constantly moist but not waterlogged. Give them a light fertilization every other week. Blooming will normally cease in late winter to early spring, but continue to keep them moist and fertilized until fall. During the fall, stop fertilizing, and give the plants only enough water so the stems do not shrivel in order to encourage flower bud formation. Though these plants seem to flower best if kept a little pot bound, flowers will diminish if they are too crowded. If you haven't repotted in several years, or if you notice a decrease in flowering from the previous year, move the plant to a larger pot in the spring. If possible, move the plants outside for the summer. Choose a shady spot because these plants will not tolerate full sun. Leave the plants outside until frost threatens. Normally the plants will have received enough cool nights in the 50- to 55-degree range that flower buds will have formed. However, if they haven't, subjecting the plants to nights greater than 12 hours long and temperatures between 59 and 69 degrees can also generate flowers. Twenty-five consecutive long nights is enough for flower initiation. Place the plants in an unused room or cover them with a dark cloth or cardboard box to insure that they receive uninterrupted darkness. After the flower buds have formed, it takes an additional nine to 10 weeks for flowers to complete development and bloom.

### *Firewood*

Not all firewood is created equal. Some species of trees are able to produce much more heat per cord of wood. A cord is the amount of wood in a well-stacked woodpile measuring 4 feet wide by 8 feet long by 4 feet high.

Following are heat values (in million BTUs) per cord for various species of trees. The higher the value, the better the wood.

Ash, Green	22.8	
Cottonwood	15.9	
Elm, American	19.8	Difficult to split
Elm, Siberian	20.9	Difficult to split
Hackberry	21.0	

Honeylocust	25.6	
Locust, Black	28.3	Difficult to split
Maple, Sugar	24.0	
Maple, Silver	18.9	
Mulberry	25.3	
Oak, Red	24.0	
Oak, Bur	24.9	
Oak, Post	25.6	
Osage Orange (Hedge)	32.6	Sparks, do not use in open fireplace
Sycamore	19.5	Difficult to split
Walnut, Black	21.8	

Remember to obtain firewood locally. Emerald Ash Borer is now in Kansas because of transported wood.

### ***Storing Power Equipment for the Winter***

Late fall or early winter is a good time to service power equipment such as mowers, tillers and garden tractors. Run the equipment out of gas or treat the existing gas with a stabilizer as untreated gas can deteriorate over time. If using a stabilizer, run the engine long enough for untreated gas in the carburetor bowl to be burned and replaced. This is also a good time to replace the oil (and filter, if present) since the engine is warm. Check and replace the spark plug if necessary. Some gardeners will also apply a light, sprayable oil into the cylinder through the spark plug hole. Check and clean air filters and replace if necessary. Many mowers and tillers will have a foam prefilter that can become filthy with use. If allowed to become too dirty, engines will run poorly or may not run at all. Sharpen blades, clean tines, tighten screws, replace broken parts and do all the other things needed to keep equipment in good shape. Though such maintenance takes some time and effort, it pays for itself by reducing frustration and lost time due to poorly performing equipment during a hectic spring.

### ***Soil Prep Now for Peas Next Spring***

Peas can be planted earlier in the spring than just about any other vegetable crop because they can grow well at a soil temperature of 40 degrees. Though other crops such as lettuce, parsnips and spinach can sprout at lower temperatures (35 degrees), they don't start growing well until the soil reaches about 45 degrees. However, soils are often too wet to work in the spring. Therefore, you may wish to prepare the soil now rather than next spring so that planting can take place as early as possible even if those spring soils are wet. Wait until soil temperatures reach 40 degrees next spring and sprinkle the seeds on the soil and push them in with your finger. Protection from rabbits and deer will probably be needed as they're attracted to anything green coming up so early.

Larry E. Crouse  
 Butler County Horticulture Agent  
 K-State Research & Extension  
 206 N Griffith, Suite A  
 El Dorado, KS 67042  
 (316)321-9660  
[lcrouse@ksu.edu](mailto:lcrouse@ksu.edu)