

The Grapevine

Getting into the Spirit with Holiday Plants

Thanksgiving is almost here and Christmas is right around the corner. With the change in the season Christmas plants are becoming common at stores everywhere you look. This weekend when I was out shopping I saw some beautiful Lavender and Rosemary bushes trimmed up in a Christmas Tree shape. For those of you who love herbs and the smell of those plants these would make a beautiful alternative to smaller trees. Around the area cut Christmas trees are for sale and while they smell wonderful and look even better, there are some dangers with using cut trees in your house. I have a few tips and ideas that can keep your Christmas plants beautiful throughout this holiday season and ways to keep your Christmas tree looking great all through the month of December.



Nothing says Christmas like a fresh cut Christmas tree, and picking the right one is a major key to success. As you look for your tree, not only should you be looking at the shape but you should also be checking to see how freshly cut the tree is. If the tree isn't frozen, run your finger up and down the branches or in the cases of a small tree pick it up and shake it. The needles on a fresh tree shouldn't fall off, and if a large number of needles fall off that is a sign the tree is starting to dry out.. Store your tree outside or in a cool spot till you are ready to bring it inside. Before you bring the tree in, cut the bottom of the tree off at a diagonal about 1" above the original cut. This allows the tree to draw water

up and keep it hydrated throughout the season. Keep your tree away from drafts or hot areas as they dry trees out faster and always keep water in the reservoir. Dry Christmas trees are a fire hazard so keep your tree hydrated and always check your lights before putting them on.

A recent trend is to use a Christmas tree in a pot. This is an excellent way to have a live tree that you can enjoy for years to come. Caring for these trees when they are inside is easy, simply keep the plant watered and keep it in a cooler location. It's best to bring these trees inside only a week before Christmas to reduce the chances that they break dormancy and start growing. You will have to transition the tree to the outdoors once you are done with it for the holidays. Place the tree in a cooler location such as an unheated garage so it can become used to cooler temperatures and be sure when you move it outside you water it well and surround the trunk with mulch or plant material to insulate it. An alternative to a spruce or pine tree if you want a living tree is a Norfolk Island Pine. These plants make wonderful houseplants and can be decorated for a variety of holidays. Treat them like other houseplants through the year but be aware they can get big with time.

Poinsettias are another popular Christmas plant, and despite what is commonly thought, they are not poisonous but I wouldn't recommend eating them since they do cause upset stomach and in pets can cause vomiting, drooling and diarrhea. Poinsettias are fairly easy to take care of, they prefer bright direct light so a sunny window is ideal but be sure to keep them away from drafts and temperature fluctuations. Remember that the temperature close to a window will be cooler than in other parts of the room. Be sure to water thoroughly and don't let the poinsettias dry completely out as that will shorten their flowering time. If you would like you can keep your poinsettias and try to get them to bloom next year. Once they have stopped flowering cut the plant back to 4-6 inches tall and water sparingly. Treat your poinsettia like a houseplant till late September.



One final thought when bringing Christmas Trees and other blooming plants into a house is that often these plants bring in tiny visitors which can spread to your houseplants. Try to keep your new plants and tree separated from your current houseplants to prevent bugs from spreading. With a few simple tips your Christmas plants can bring you cheer throughout the Christmas season and all year long.

Check out this video on making an Amaryllis Kokedama as a fun and easy winter project:

<https://www.butler.k-state.edu/horticulture/hortvideos.html>

Reminders:

Make sure your lawn irrigation system is winterized for the fall

If there are spring-flowering bulbs that you forgot to plant, plant them now. Don't wait until spring.

Dormant seed bare spots in your lawn starting in December. For more information check out this article: <https://www.johnson.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/agent-articles/lawns/dormant-seeding.html>

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