

Gardeners' Checklist for December

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



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Poinsettias are widely available now and can brighten any holiday decor during the Christmas season. With a little care, poinsettias can last long after the toys are broken and the holiday bills are paid!



December has arrived and one would not believe it gauging how my AC unit has been running. Weather conditions over the pass few weeks have provided something for everyone to like. If you like it pleasantly warm, you had it at times. If you like it crisply cool, you also had that.

Compared to 2011, the 2012 year has been rather decent in terms of rainfall and temperatures. However, the Upper Gulf Coast region has been inching closer to drought conditions. Let's hope that rains over the late fall and winter seasons become more generous.

Trees and shrubs in the home landscape will still be dependent on adequate rainfall occurring throughout the upcoming winter to survive.

The month of December ushers in a state of dormancy for many landscape trees and shrubs. What is good for plants is oftentimes good for the gardener. December can also be a quasi-dormant state for gardeners also.

Therefore, I will avoid most high-energy consumption chores. There should be something for every gardener to do and even enjoy among the following activities:

The Urban Farmstead Seminar: Presentation provided for homeowners who wish to have a better and more self-sufficient life whether they live on a city lot or small acreage. Topics include intensive vegetable gardening, back yard poultry and small livestock production. Video presentations will be presented of urban farmsteads

on city lots and small acreages in Galveston County. This seminar is about ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Program conducted on December 8 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park at 4102-B Main in La Marque. Preregistration fee of \$12 covers lunch and program handouts. Preregistration must be made by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 6 (e-mail: GALV3@wt.net or phone: 281-309-5065).

COLD PROTECTION FOR PLANTS: The first days of December were very warm but be prepared to provide protection to cold-sensitive plants should cold temperatures come into the forecast.

POINSETTIAS: Christmas

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poinsettias are widely available now. Poinsettias like to stay evenly moist, never completely dry or sitting in standing water, though they are often displayed sitting in decorative foil coverings or ornamental containers that do not have drainage holes in the bottom.

Be sure to take your poinsettia out of these types of decorative pots before watering. Water your poinsettia whenever the surface of the soil appears dry and the plant feels light when you lift it.

The best way to water a poinsettia is to place it in a sink and add water until it begins to drip out of the bottom of the pot. Allow the plant to remain in the sink until all extra water has drained out of the pot and then place it back into its ornamental container.

If your poinsettia is sitting in a container with a saucer underneath, pour out any extra water the saucer captures after watering.

TRANSPLANT TREES AND SHRUBS: December through February is an excellent time to transplant trees and shrubs. Transplanting during the winter season allows the root system of transplants to become better established prior to spring growth and summer heat. This significantly reduces plant stress during the following summer.

As previously mentioned, we are a bit on the dry side so be sure to water newly planted trees and shrubs regularly during dry spells over the winter season.

PRUNING: Don't be in a hurry to prune woody plants. Very late December through early February is usually the best time to perform most winter pruning.

CARE OF CHRISTMAS TREES: Keep the water reservoir in your Christmas tree stand filled with water at all times. A Christmas tree requires lots of water, especially when the home heating

system is in operation.

The tree will take up a larger quantity of water at first (as much as a gallon or more a day), but water uptake will slack off later. Tests show that a 6-foot Christmas tree will take up between 1 and 2 pints of water per day, on average, during a 3-week season.

CONTROL OF COOL SEASON WEEDS: Yes, weeds do continue to grow during the winter season. Do not let these unwanted bullies take over your flower beds. A 3-to-4 inch layer of mulch will prevent most cool season weed seeds from sprouting. It is more effective to keep weeds under control with regular efforts than to try to correct a situation that has gotten out of control due to inattention.

HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR THE GARDENER: If you are stumped for ideas on holiday gifts, don't overlook the many gardening items that could please any member of the family. Power garden tools, hand tools for kids, special plants, nursery gift certificates, bird feeders, garden statuary, and books are just a few items gardening friends would appreciate.

