

Clark County Horticulture Newsletter

From the Ground Up!

December 2023



Clark County Extension Service • 1400 Fortune Drive • Winchester, KY 40391 • 859-744-4682 • clark.ext@uky.edu • <http://clark.ca.uky.edu/>

A Word from the Agent...



Happy December my friends! 2023 has flown by and it's hard to believe we are entering the last month. I hope the year has been kind to each of you.

We had a lot of dry weather this year and it's possible some of our landscape plants will show the effect of it next year. As we move into the snow and ice season, remember to be reserved on the amount of salt and de-icer you apply to sidewalks with plants right beside, as the run off can affect them quite a bit. Also be sure to keep your fingers crossed that we don't get another round of -30 degree temps this winter like we did last December. Many of us are still working on replacing and repairing the damage done to our plants from that. Plus it was just simply too cold for this person. I still have some toe-less chickens from that blast!

I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday season, and you know to call me if you have any horticulture needs!

Carrie Spry
Clark County Extension Agent for Horticulture
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Merry Christmas
HAPPY NEW YEAR

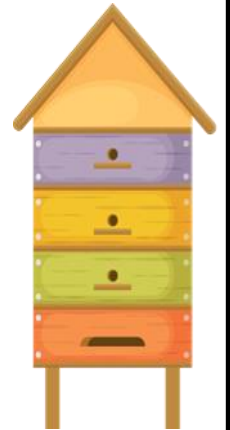
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Clark / Powell Beekeepers Association Meeting

**No Meeting
in December!**

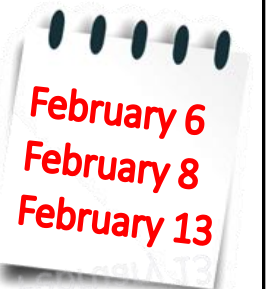
**Meetings will resume
in January 2024!**



The Clark County Extension Service
will be **CLOSED** for the holidays
beginning December 23, 2023
and will reopen on January 2, 2024.

Save the
DATES
2024 Winter School

More information to come in
future HORT newsletters!




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Disabilities
accommodated
with prior notification.



From Tree Thief to Holiday Tradition:

The Story of Mistletoe



Once autumn leaves have fallen, mistletoe becomes highly visible on large trees throughout Kentucky. *Phoradendron*, the scientific name for Kentucky's most common type of this parasitic plant, means tree thief. These small leafy plants are commonly found on twigs and branches of many hardwood species in the southern United States. Mistletoe extracts (steals) water, mineral elements, and food from tree hosts; hence the name.

Mistletoe use in holiday traditions has roots in pagan times. The appearance of a live parasitic plant while the host tree appears dead led some to believe mistletoe mysteriously held the life of the tree during winter. Druids harvested mistletoe in a special rite, never allowing the plant to touch the ground, and then hung it in their homes for good luck.

Our modern-day mistletoe holiday tradition likely originates with a mythological Norse goddess of love and beauty. Frigga, whose son was restored from possible death by mistletoe, was thought to bestow a kiss on anyone walking beneath one. Today, when two people meet under the mistletoe, tradition suggests they must exchange a kiss for good luck.

Phoradendron has simple, fleshy green leaves arranged oppositely on stems (Figure 1). Stems are short and more branched than host trees, so mistletoe often appears as a spherical bunch of dense vegetation (Figure 2). These bunches may be a foot or two in diameter and are located high in the tree where sun exposure is greatest. Mistletoe berries range from white to straw-colored to light red. Birds eat the fruits, reportedly toxic to human and animals, then deposit the seeds onto branches where they germinate and penetrate the next host tree.



Figure 1: The *Phoradendron* mistletoe has simple, fleshy green leaves. (Photo: Paul A. Mistretta, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org)



Figure 2: Mistletoe often appear as a spherical bunch of dense vegetation. (Photo: John Hartman, UK)

Mistletoe commonly appears in open-grown trees where birds tend to roost, thereby less frequently in forest trees. Generally, mistletoe causes minimal damage, although it can be harmful to stressed trees. Mistletoe can be removed from landscape trees by pruning.



I am in the process of working on my program planning for 2024. I would like to hear from you regarding possible classes you would be interested in taking. This would help me cover your interests.

Just email me with your ideas at carrie.spry@uky.edu, call the office at 859-744-4682, or drop me a note at 1400 Fortune Drive, Winchester, KY 40391.

Carrie Spry

Clark County Extension Agent for Horticulture



Cut Christmas Tree Care Tips!

Here is a link to the Kentucky Christmas Tree Farm Associations Find-A-Farm page, to help you find a local tree farm near you,

<https://kychristmastreefarms.com/find-a-farmgoogle-map/>

- 1 Use a tree stand with an adequate water-holding capacity. A tree stand should have a water basin that provides 1 quart of water per inch of stem diameter. For most Christmas trees, the stand should hold at least 1 gallon of water. A cut tree will absorb a surprising amount of water, particularly during the first week, so replenish the water daily.
- 2 The tree stand should fit your tree. Some stands have circular rings at the top, so the ring must be large enough for the trunk of your tree to go through the hole. Avoid whittling down the sides of the trunk to fit a stand. The outer layers of wood are the most efficient in taking up water and should not be removed.
- 3 If the tree is to be stored for more than a couple of days before display, it is advisable to place its trunk in water and store it in a cool, shaded, and protected, area such as an unheated garage.
- 4 If the tree has been cut within the past 12 hours, it will not be necessary to recut the trunk prior to display indoors. If it has been longer than 12 hours since harvest, the trunk should be recut to improve water uptake.
- 5 Cutting off a disk of wood about 1/4" thick from the base of the trunk is all that is necessary before putting the tree in the stand. Make the cut perpendicular to the stem axis. Don't cut the trunk at an angle, or into a v-shape, which makes it far more difficult to hold the tree in the stand and also reduces the amount of water available to the tree.
- 6 Keep displayed trees away from sources of heat (fireplaces, heaters, heat vents, and direct sunlight). Lowering the room temperature will slow the drying process, resulting in less water consumption each day.
- 7 The temperature of the water used to fill the stand is not important and does not affect water uptake.
- 8 Check the stand daily to make sure that the level of water does not go below the base of the tree. With many stands, there can still be water in the stand even though the base of the tree is no longer submerged in water.
- 9 Drilling a hole in the base of the trunk does not improve water uptake.
- 10 The use of "IV" type devices to supply water directly to holes drilled into the sides of the tree trunk is not as effective as displaying the tree in a more traditional, water-holding tree stand.
- 11 Applying anti-transpirants to the tree does not have a significant effect on the rate of moisture loss. These products are marketed as a way to block evaporation from the foliage surface, but, in reality, they have little effect on a cut tree displayed indoors.
- 12 Adding water-holding gels to the stand is not beneficial, and they can reduce the amount of water in the stand that is available to the tree.
- 13 Do not use additives, such as floral preservatives, commercial tree preservatives, molasses, sugar, bleach, soft drinks, aspirin, honey, and other concoctions, in the water. Clean water is all that is needed to maintain freshness.
- 14 Displaying trees in water with the proper care is much more effective in reducing fire hazards than spraying trees with flame retardants. Some flame retardants can damage needles and actually increase the rate of moisture loss from trees.
- 15 Monitor your tree for dryness. Run your fingers across the needles to determine whether they are dry and brittle. If the needles break easily or fall off in your hand, the tree is dry and should be removed.
- 16 Newer LED Christmas lights generate less heat than older types of lighting. Always turn the lights off when the tree is unattended.



As temperatures remain frosty across much of the nation, cutting the grass, trimming hedges, and other outdoor chores seem far off. But now is a good time to check the lithium-ion batteries for your cordless electric mower and other battery-powered outdoor tools.

The batteries that power your mower, string trimmer, or leaf blower are expensive to replace, which makes keeping them in working order all the more important. "Even without a gasoline engine to winterize, you'll need to take other steps to protect your lithium-ion batteries from damage during long stretches of storage," says Dave Trezza, who oversees our testing of string trimmers, leaf blowers, and other outdoor power equipment.

These tips will extend the life of your gear's lithium-ion batteries:

◆ Store Batteries Indoors

Even if you store the tools themselves in a garage or shed, bring the batteries inside. Extreme temperatures can shorten the life span of the cells inside batteries and cause them to fail prematurely. Keeping them indoors minimizes temperature fluctuation. Check the owner's manual for an exact range, but most batteries do best when stored between 40° F and 80° F.

◆ Keep the Charge at 40 Percent

If it's going to be 30 days or longer before you next use your lithium-ion battery to power a tool, try to charge—or discharge—the battery to roughly 40 percent of its capacity. Some batteries display the charge right on the battery or the charger.

Others rely on a series of four lights—indicating that the battery is at 25, 50, 75, or 100 percent of capacity. If you have one of these, run the battery in a tool until right after the 50 percent light goes off, indicating that the battery is somewhere between 25 and 50 percent of capacity.

Remember to check the owner's manual—some batteries have embedded software that will discharge to the optimal level after going

◆ Check Your Manual

Some lithium-ion batteries do well with a charge in the middle of the storage season; others don't require one. Check the manual to see what the manufacturer advises.

Ego, whose lawn mower, string trimmer, leaf blower, and chain saw have all performed well in Consumer Reports' tests, says its gear doesn't require any midseason charging.

GreenWorks, however, advises charging the battery to full capacity every two months when it's in storage, then draining it back down to 40 percent.



Many people enjoy making New Year's Resolutions, so I would like to encourage you to make some gardening resolutions. Even those of you who do not typically grow anything can reap benefits from planting something, nurturing it, and watching it grow. It doesn't have to be a large vegetable garden. A small container garden or raised bed garden will be just fine.

According to many sources, regular gardening activities

increases a sense of wellness and was found to decrease a person's health complaints, equivalent to someone five years younger. Recent research has shown that gardens and green spaces in general, provide "accelerated recovery" for hospital patients. (Ulrich, Roger; Simons, Robert; Losito, Barbara; Fiorito, Evelyn; Miles, Mark; Zelson, Michael. Stress Recovery During Exposure to Natural and Urban Environments. Volume 11, Issue 3, September 1991, pg. 201-230) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agrees, stating that gardening is great exercise and motivates people to stay active longer than other activities. (CDC (April 22nd, 2014). Gardening Health and Safety Tips. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/family/gardening>.)



Resolution #1: Try something new! Maybe you don't have a green thumb and really don't know how to grow plants. No problem. Start with a couple of containers on your back patio and plant a tomato plant, some cilantro, and a couple of peppers. Very little maintenance is required, and you will have all the ingredients for fresh salsa. If you are a regular gardener, try a new plant in your landscape or a new variety of tomato in the garden. Diversity in any garden adds interest and helps with disease problems.



Resolution #2: Make a garden plan and stick to it! The more seasoned gardeners can relate to this resolution. Proper planning will help reduce weed, insect, and disease pressures. Rotating crops, mulching, or even row covers will reduce dependence on pesticides and most likely will increase yields. Start now selecting good varieties that are resistant to disease and insect pressures. Keep notes on how well the plants performed for reference next season. Plan now and stick to it.



Resolution #3: Get children involved with gardening! According to the Journal of Public Health, just being outside in the fresh air will help prevent Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and result in higher test scores with students. (Kuo FE, Faber Taylor A. A Potential Natural Treatment for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Evidence From a National Study. American Journal of Public Health. 2004;94(9):1580-1586). Several studies show that children will eat more vegetables and try new foods more readily if they grow the food themselves.

Losing weight, increasing exercise, and eating better are all common New Year's resolutions. Gardening can provide a path to all three and who doesn't enjoy fresh vegetables and showy flowers on a regular basis? Consider making some resolutions to get out, plant, and grow something and talk with your local Cooperative Extension Service if you need some advice on getting started.

Historically, I am not a fan of resolutions... and, if truth be told, I have not followed through with the few New Year's resolutions that I have made in the past. I prefer a different label — intentions. I intend to get out, plant, and grow more this year!

- Submitted by Andrew Rideout, Agent for Horticulture, Henderson Co. Cooperative Extension Service



Gus' QUICK TIPS

for DECEMBER

- 1 Make sure your evergreens are well watered going into the winter months.
- 2 Outdoor pond inhabitants may encounter problems if the pond freezes over and gases cannot escape. A basketball floated on the surface will often keep a small spot from freezing.
- 3 If you haven't already, empty and store flower pots for the season. Many pots, particularly clay and ceramic, will be damaged by moisture and freezing temperatures.
- 4 It seems early, but start planning gardens and place seed orders soon. Many popular items and new offerings will sell out early.
- 5 Use fallen leaves to mulch your vegetable garden. These can be tilled in next spring to add valuable organic matter. They will also protect the soil by preventing erosion, compaction, and to a degree, inhibit cool season weeds from germinating.
- 6 Water is often as limited a resource for birds as food. If you enjoy feeding and watching birds try a bird bath de-icer or electric pet bowl. See if you don't attract more feathered friends than before.
- 7 If you will be establishing a new lawn this spring, **Do A Soil Test Now!** New ground usually benefits from an application of nitrogen, and sometimes phosphorus, potassium or lime (ONLY if pH is too low).
- 8 Be careful where you throw de-icing salt, as well as the contaminated slush, snow and ice which you scoop off the walks. Most plants are easily damaged by these salts. Try using sand, sawdust, urea fertilizer or kitty litter for traction rather than the de-icing salts, or buy a brand which is labeled "**safe for plants**".
- 9 Avoid walking on frozen turf as much as possible. Whenever you hear the crunch of icy grass, you are actually damaging the crown (growing point) of the frozen grass plant.
- 10 Your landscape can be a great source of materials for holiday decorating. Light pruning will generally not harm your plants in the winter and you may be surprised at the variety in your own yard. Don't just consider evergreens, but use ornamental grasses, pine cones, fruits, berries, even mosses in your decorating.

What's Cooking?



Sweet and Spicy Brussels Sprouts

1 pound (2 cups) Brussels sprouts	1 teaspoon fresh cracked black pepper	Drizzle: ½ teaspoon hot sauce
1 tablespoon olive oil	½ teaspoon sea salt	1 tablespoon honey
1 teaspoon garlic powder	1 teaspoon red pepper flakes	

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Wash Brussels sprouts, **remove** outer leaves and **cut** each sprout in half.

Mix olive oil, sea salt, garlic powder, black pepper and red pepper flakes in a medium sized bowl. **Add** Brussels sprouts to the mixture and **stir** to coat evenly. **Mix** the hot sauce and honey in a small bowl and set aside. **Place** Brussels sprouts on a greased baking

sheet. **Bake** 30 minutes or until tender. **Drizzle** hot sauce mixture over top of cooked Brussels sprouts.

Yield: 4, ½ cup servings

Nutritional Analysis: 70 calories, 3.5 g fat, 0.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 320 mg sodium, 9 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 5 g sugars, 2 g protein.