

GROWING PAINS



January 2020 Newsletter for the MiraCosta Horticulture Club of Oceanside

Next meeting Saturday, January 11, 2020
Garden Room, Alta Vista Gardens,
1270 Vale Terrace Drive, Vista, CA 92084
11 am to 3 pm

Workshop: Bulbs for spring potting
Program: Bee-Friendly Gardening
Hillary of "Girl Next Door Honey"

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Thanks to everyone for all the great food and helping set up and clearing up. Thanks to Linda H. and Salli B for providing the poinsettias, cyclamen and Christmas cactus.

Presidents Message

I want to thank everyone for the Holiday Potluck and Chinese Raffle. It was a great social event to end the year and take time to be grateful for friends and family. I wish everyone a Happy Holiday time and Merry Christmas. Enjoy the Holidays and I look forward to seeing you January 10, 2020. Call me at 760-295-5917 if you have any concerns. Happy Holidays!
Ed Lopez

Now, Special thanks to everyone for the Holiday Potluck Food and Plants:

The food was delicious and the desert table was popular. Cindi baked the ham, made the mashed potatoes and provided the beautiful Christmas china dishes. The dining room was so cheerful and added to the great atmosphere.

Ed Fitzgerald set up early, Becky arrived early, also, and helped set up the room. Becky took those fabulous red tablecloths home to be washed and ready for another event at the clubhouse.

Keeping those Holiday plants alive:

Many holiday plants, Christmas cactus, amaryllis, rosemary, kalanchoe, living Christmas Trees, can be moved into the garden and enjoyed for months to come. I have not been too successful with the poinsettias, but a successful transition can start by removing the festive foils around the pots to preserve root health. Do not overwater, as that kills most of the plants. Good rule, water thoroughly, and do not water again until the soil is almost dry.

Christmas cactus and amaryllis will continue to bloom and thrive inside for a few weeks in a sunny but cool spot. I have had great success with living Christmas trees, rosemary and kalanchoe by putting them outside in a sunny but cool spot. Every year we had a living tree, and planted them outside until we realized we had created an Iowa windbreak. When moving the plants outside, "harden them off" with exposure to a cooler sheltered area for a few hours a day. I gradually increased the time outdoors so the plant adjusted to the sunlight and temperature. Don't fertilize, as cold weather is coming and it could damage tender new

growth. Most of my plants made it to spring last year, so let me know if you have success, too.

Susan was in Rome over Thanksgiving, and she said the city was full of red and white cyclamen in large circular ceramic planters. The plant is native to Turkey and dry heat or too much sun (like in a warm window) can kill these winter bloomers. With bright, but indirect light and cool day temperatures, the cyclamen can bloom into spring.

If you want to plant your cyclamen in the garden, the tubers of the florist cyclamen should be half in and half out of the ground. As the weather gets warmer, the leaves will fall off and the plant becomes dormant. If planted in well-drained soil and not overwatered, it will perk up and bloom in the fall.

Plant a tree for the environment:

Although putting a tree in the ground might not sound like rocket science, in recent decades scientific research has overhauled much of the traditional wisdom about planting saplings, including some ideas that sound a little strange. So, let me explain why science proves that it's better to plant trees in square holes.

Traditionally, trees were planted in round holes, perhaps because their trunks are round, as is the spread of their canopies. It was just one of those seemingly obvious, unquestioned assumptions. But here's what happens to the tree's roots when you plant them in a round hole, especially one filled with lots of rich compost and fertilizer, as the old guide books suggest. The little sapling will rapidly start growing new roots that will spread out into the rich, fluffy growing media, giving you excellent early success. However, once they hit the comparatively poorer and compacted soil at the perimeter of the hole, the roots will react by snaking along the edge of the hole's edge in search of more ideal growing conditions.

Eventually, this spiraling action around the limits of the hole will create a circular root system, with the plants essentially acting much as they do when grown in a container. Once the roots mature, they will thicken and harden into a tight ring, creating an underground girdle that will choke the plant, eventually resulting in the severe stunting and even death of your treasured tree.

The very simple and counterintuitive act of digging a square planting hole will dramatically reduce the chances of this happening. This is because systematic planting trials have shown that roots are not that good at growing round corners. When they hit the tight, 90-degree angle of your square hole, instead of sneaking

around to create a spiral, they flare out of the planting hole to colonize the native soil.

This has been shown consistently to speed up tree establishment and make the specimens more resistant to environmental challenges, such as drought. Considering that spade blades are flat, digging a square hole, to me at least, seems far easier than cutting a perfectly circular one. It's an easy win-win.

Want to boost your chances of success further still? Instead of incorporating loads of rich organic matter and fertilizer in the hole, simply backfill the hole with the soil that you have dug out of it. This will further reduce the "container effect" on the roots' behavior. While you are at it, prune any twisted or matted roots from the edge of the root ball before you plant the sapling. Despite feeling a bit brutal, this sort of root pruning actually triggers the production of compounds that actively stimulate root growth. Try getting better results by planting round root balls into square holes. Let me know how this works for you.

Sad News – Kim is retiring

Our long-time newsletter editor, Kim Cyr, will be retiring from the Club. Kim has been a member for 20 years, and has been newsletter editor for 19 years. We hope there is someone in the Club who would like to take over the job of newsletter editor. Kim has said she would be happy to offer guidance to the new editor, if needed.

Christmas Cactus Care

Nikki Tilley

While the Christmas cactus may be known under various names (like Thanksgiving cactus or Easter cactus), the scientific name for Christmas cactus, *Schlumbergera bridgessii*, remains the same. This popular, winter-flowering houseplant makes a great addition to nearly any indoor setting. Christmas cactus is not only easy to care for but propagates easily too, making it an exceptional candidate for holiday gift giving.

How to Care for Christmas Cactus:

Christmas cactus performs well under average home conditions with moderate care. The Christmas cactus will adapt to low light conditions, but the plant will produce blooms more readily if exposed to brighter light. That being said, too much direct sunlight can burn its leaves, so keep the Christmas cactus in an

appropriate area to avoid this. Christmas cactus moisture is important as well. The plant requires frequent and thorough watering, during its active growth in spring and summer. Allow Christmas cactus to dry out some between watering intervals, but never completely, and never let the plant sit in water, as this will lead to root and stem rot. Applying a mild houseplant fertilizer solution every other week is also acceptable.

Placing a tray of pebbles filled with water beneath the Christmas cactus container is a good way to add more humidity. Once the Christmas cactus has ceased all flowering (usually by fall), or about six to eight weeks before you want the plant to rebloom, you should allow the plant to begin its dormancy cycle. Simply cut back the watering and make sure the plant receives 12-14 hours of darkness and average temperatures around 50-55 F. (10-12 C.).

Caring for Outdoor Poinsettia Plants

Teo Spengler

Many Americans only see poinsettia plants when they are wrapped in tinsel on the holiday table. If that's your experience, it's time you learned about growing poinsettia plants outside. If you live in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 10 through 12, you can begin planting poinsettia outdoors. Just be sure that cold temperatures in your area don't drop below 45 degrees F. (7 C.). In the right climate and with the right planting location and care, these bright Christmas favorites can shoot up to 10-foot shrubs in rapid order. Water your potted poinsettia when the soil starts getting dry and place it in a sunny location in your home, protected from air currents.

Growing Poinsettia Plants Outside:

Poinsettia plants outdoors must have a sunny corner to call home, somewhere protected from harsh winds that can damage them quickly. Choose a spot with slightly acidic, well-draining soil. Be sure it drains well to avoid root rot. Don't transplant poinsettia plants outdoors right after Christmas. Once all of the leaves have died back, prune the bushes back to two buds and keep it in a bright location. You can start planting poinsettia outdoors after all chance of frost has passed.

Caring for Outdoor Poinsettia Plants:

Caring for outdoor poinsettia plants is not very time consuming or intricate. Once you see green shoots in spring, start a regular watering and feeding program. If you opt to use water soluble fertilizer, add it to the

watering can every other week. Alternatively, use slow release pellets in spring. Poinsettia plants outdoors tend to grow tall and leggy. Prevent this by regular trimming. Pinching back the tips of new growth creates a bushier plant, but the bracts themselves are smaller.

How to Grow Amaryllis Bulbs Outdoors

Amaryllis is as popular a holiday gift plant as poinsettia and Christmas cactus. Once the attractive blooms fade, though, we're left wondering what to do next. It may come as a pleasant surprise to know that in warmer climates, up to USDA Zone 7b, planting amaryllis outside in the garden is an option too.

Amaryllis Planting Outdoors:

Amaryllis make great specimens outdoors. They perform well in beds, borders or containers outside. You can also scatter them throughout the landscape in naturalized areas. These plants look exceptionally attractive when planted in groups. Best of all, amaryllis bulbs are deemed resistant to both deer and many rodents.

Typically, new bulbs are planted with other spring bloomers – in fall. Those gifted to you (or purchased plants) can go outside in spring, after the threat of frost has passed. Wait until the plants have finished blooming too. Prior to moving these plants outside, however, you'll want to gradually acclimate them to their new environment.

How to Grow Amaryllis in the Garden:

Once amaryllis plants are ready to be planted, you'll have to decide where to put them. First, consider light, since those being acclimated will need to slowly be introduced to more light anyway. Amaryllis can tolerate both sun and shade fairly well, but typically fare better somewhere in between – like partial shade. Too much sunlight can lead to leaf burn, while flowering may be limited in too much shade. Next, consider the soil in the area you want to grow amaryllis. These bulbs prefer well-draining soil. You can improve drainage by creating raised beds or simply mix in some organic matter, like peat or compost. Planting amaryllis outdoors is much the same as in containers, neck deep, keeping the top 1/3 of the bulb sticking up above soil level. Space plants 12-15 inches apart. Water well following planting until established.

Amaryllis Garden Care:

Amaryllis appreciate at least one feeding upon emergence in early spring. Although not necessary,

additional fertilizer can be applied a couple more times throughout the growing season as needed using a balanced fertilizer at the recommended rates. Amaryllis also needs to be kept moist throughout the growing season, though established plants are fairly tolerant of drought. Once planted outside, forced amaryllis bulbs will eventually revert back to their natural spring blooming cycle. Once flowers have faded, remove the stalks. You can expect foliage to remain throughout much of summer before succumbing to fall frosts. Adding about a 2-inch layer of mulch around your plants will not only help conserve moisture and reduce weed growth, but will offer them added protection once cooler temps arrive. Should plants become overcrowded, divide the clumps and separate as needed. Growing amaryllis in the garden is a great way to enjoy these plants year after year.

Save Seeds From Your Garden for a Seed Swap

Robin Sweetser

Saving seeds from your favorite plants and swapping them with friends is one of the best ways to share your love of gardening. It can be economical, since a single flower can generate dozens or even hundreds of seeds. And it lets you keep your favorite flowers or crops growing next year!

Open-pollinated or Hybrid Seeds?

Before you start collecting you need to know that it may not be worth saving all seeds. Know the difference between open-pollinated varieties and hybrids.

Open-pollinated plants are the best seeds to save. They are created by natural means—wind, insects, gravity, birds. These plants look just like their parent plants. It is called “coming true to seed.” Sometimes you get an oddball called a “sport”. All heirloom plants are open-pollinated.

Hybrids come from plant breeders who carefully selected the parent plants to develop a unique variety with improved traits. Seeds saved from a hybrid usually revert back to a distant ancestor that is not the same as the parent plant. It's better to take cuttings or divisions of a hybrid to get an exact copy or buy fresh seed.

Easy-Peasy

With some plants such as poppies and columbine, seed collecting is as easy as waiting till the pods dry on the plants and putting them in an envelope. Pansies and

impatiens tend to scatter their seed before you even notice it is ripe.

Coneflowers and other daisy-like flowers hold their seeds longer making them easy to collect. If the seeds you are waiting for might drop before you can collect them, try tying a small paper or cloth bag over the ripening seed pods. Large seeds like peas, beans, corn, peppers, sunflowers, morning glories, cosmos, hollyhocks, calendula, and zinnias are easy to collect. Many smaller seeds like delphinium, larkspur, cleome, nicotiana, nigella, mallows, and foxglove are contained in large seed pods making them easy to harvest also.

Once you have chosen the plants to collect seed from, leave several fruits or seed heads on the plant to mature. With vegetables, the fruit should remain on the plant 1-2 weeks beyond the time when you would pick them to eat. They need to be fully ripe but not rotten. For most flowers, the seeds are ready to harvest about a month after the blossoms fade, when the seed heads turn brown. The best time to gather seeds is in the afternoon on a dry, sunny day.

Dry and Store

Even if the seeds appear dry when you collect them, spread them out on paper to dry for about a week before storing. Try to separate as much debris from the seeds as possible since chaff can harbor insect eggs or fungi. Place seeds in an envelope labeled with info you may need including plant name, height, color, and date collected. Keep envelopes of seeds in a cool dry place, in an airtight container. If humidity is a problem, put a little powdered milk in the bottom of the container to absorb any moisture. The fridge or freezer is a great place for seed storage because the colder seed is kept, the longer it will remain viable.

Host a Seed Swap

If you find you have extra seeds to share, consider hosting a seed swap where interested parties bring seeds they have saved to trade for new varieties. It is a fun way to learn about new plants and get to try them out.

Happy 2020 !

