

Home Gardener



The newsletter of the Monmouth County Park System's horticultural park

Winter 1996-97

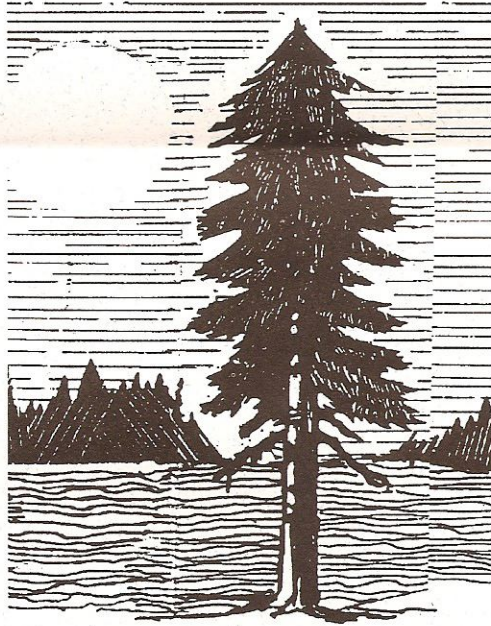
Holiday Trees

Many years ago, evergreen trees were chopped down in the woods and dragged into the house on Christmas Eve to be decorated. Today, trees are grown as crops, carefully spaced, fertilized, and pruned for 15 years or more before they get to experience 2 weeks of glory.

There are many ways to go about securing the "perfect tree." You can go to a tree farm and cut one down, purchase a pre-cut tree at any number of roadside stands, or get a living tree that will grace your yard after the holidays and bring happy memories for years to come. But whatever way you go about getting your tree, it is important to select a tree that best suits your needs.

If you plan on buying a living tree (balled and burlapped), decide ahead of time on the spot where you intend to plant it. The hole must be dug in early December before the ground freezes. Fill the hole with leaves and cover it with plastic until planting time. The soil removed from the hole should be kept in a place where it will not freeze.

Prior to bringing the live tree into your home, place it in an unheated enclosure, such as a carport, basement, or garage, where it will be protected from the elements. Before bringing the tree indoors, place the tree in a waterproof container. In order to help stabilize the tree, surround the root ball with sand and gravel. Keep the root ball moist; add a pint to a quart of water daily in order to sustain a five to six foot tree. The ideal indoor temperature for a tree is 65 to 68 degrees.



Do not keep a live tree in the home for longer than ten days. After the tree is undecorated, do not take it directly outdoors. Return it to the unheated enclosure for several days.

Before planting, scoop the leaves out of your pre-dug hole and set the tree. When planting, keep the root ball solid and secure; do not remove the burlap and strapping before planting. After the tree is positioned, fill the hole half way with the original soil. Cut the strapping and roll down the burlap. Add the rest of the soil, water thoroughly, and mulch.

When purchasing a fresh-cut tree, the best way to test its freshness is to grab hold of some needles and pull. If the tree was cut recently, the needles will stay on the branches. A fresh-cut tree that is not going to be decorated immediately should be placed in a container of water and stored in a cool shaded area sheltered from the wind. Before bringing the tree indoors, cut off an inch from the bottom of the trunk. Doing this enables the tree to take up water more easily. Immediately place it in a stand that will hold one or two gallons of water and fill it. Since fresh-cut trees will absorb a pint to a quart of water daily, the water level must be checked often. Always keep the water level above the cut end. Keeping the tree stand filled with water prevents the needles from dropping and prolongs the freshness and color of the tree.

After the holidays, a fresh-cut tree can still be useful. Putting it outdoors can create shelter for animals. Food can be hung from its branches to provide for the animals who take up residence in it. During the spring it can be turned into mulch. □

1997 All-America Selections Award Winners

During the 1996 growing season at Deep Cut, we planted some of the following All America Selections of vegetables and flowers and again had excellent results.

Thai Basil "Siam Queen" (vegetable): An improved tropical basil due to its larger leaves, thicker stems, later flowering, and strong aroma.

Okra F1 Hybrid "Cajun Delight" (vegetable): This okra caught the judges' attention for earliness, tender pods, and overall improved yield. It produces 3 1/2 to 5-inch pods in about 50 days.

Celosia Cristata "Prestige Scarlet" (flower): Offers gardeners a new plant habit with cockscomb flowers. Cockscomb bloom may be used as a fresh-cut flower or dried for an everlasting decoration.

Zinnia Angustifolia "Crystal White" (Bedding Plant): Produces a single pure-white daisy earlier than others on the market. Once flowering begins, it blooms profusely throughout the growing season and is highly tolerant of Powdery Mildew and other common diseases that affect *Z. Elegans*.

Two other hybrid winners are Cabbage "Dynamo" (vegetable) and Gypsophia "Gypsy" (flower). □

Forcing Paperwhite Narcissus

Paperwhites can be forced to bloom in bowls of water with nothing but pebbles to support the bulbs. In the bottom of a bowl, put a two to three-inch layer of pebbles such as pea stone or marble chips (available at garden centers) and mix it with charcoal granules. Position the bulbs; then, add more pebbles to cover the shoulders of the bulbs. Add water just to the base of the bulbs and maintain it at that depth. **DO NOT COVER THE BULBS WITH WATER.** Place the bowl in a sunny but cool area. A night temperature of about 50° is ideal. The bulbs do not need to be placed in the dark to root. Paperwhites should bloom in 4 to 6 weeks. □

Volunteering at Deep Cut

Anyone who would like to become more involved at Deep Cut Gardens and volunteer some time should call Monmouth County Park System Volunteer Coordinator Jeanne De Young at (908) 842-4000, ext. 283.

Q & A

Q: I've noticed that heavy snows and ice really weigh down evergreens. What should be done about this?

A: After a big storm, remove snow from evergreens by shaking the branches gently or tapping them lightly with a bamboo rake or house broom. **DO NOT** remove ice if it forms. Let it melt.

Q: How can I force my Crab-apple, forsythia and pussy willow to bloom indoors?

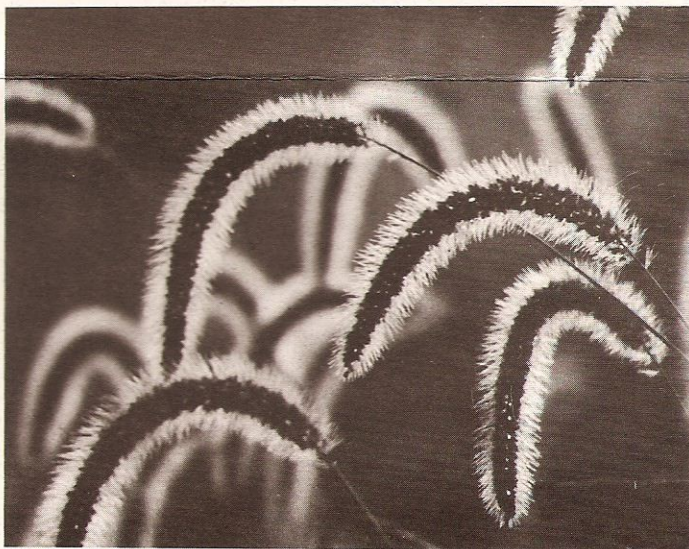
A: Wrap the bunches of stems in several layers of damp newspaper. Set them into water in a cool, brightly lit (but not too sunny) room. The buds will stay moist and will open to their fullest beauty.

Q: What is the best way to protect a flower bed in the winter?

A: Mulching a bed with pine branches (the ones from the Christmas tree will do nicely) or a light covering of hay will keep your beds safe all winter long.

Q: How can I attract birds to my yard during the winter months?

A: Food is the easiest way to attract any animal. Keep the feeders well supplied with bird seed and hang suet cakes. There are many well-balanced seed mixtures on the market. It is important that if you start winter feeding, you do not give it up. Once you start putting out feeders, they must be kept stocked all winter long, as birds will depend on you for their food. □



Steven Quirk of Middletown is the winner of this year's Deep Cut Gardens photography contest. Look for information on the 1997 contest in an upcoming issue of the Home Gardener.

✓ Check Your Calendar

DECEMBER

* Clean, sharpen, and oil all hand gardening tools before storing them for the winter.

Drain gasoline from the lawnmower, cultivator, and other power tools. Gasoline gets old, eventually becoming gummy and hard to ignite.

Plant begonia seed. Surface sow and keep moist, plus maintain good circulation to prevent damping off. Heating mats placed under seed trays will speed germination.

Increase humidity for houseplants by grouping them together. A humidifier also works well, as does setting plants above a tray of wet pebbles.

Keep incoming gardening catalogs together for a good read on a stormy day.

JANUARY

* Start off the year by cleaning your houseplants. Most foliage plants love a shower of tepid water. Not recommended for fuzzy-leaved plants such as African Violets. Pay special attention for signs of spider mites and mealy bugs.

When watering your house plants, be sure the water is at room temperature. Check over gardening supplies and determine what

you'll need for the coming year. Now is a good time to order new items.

Take the opportunity to sow indoors for this year's garden: sweet peas, snapdragons, baby's breath, begonias, and statice.

FEBRUARY

* Time to start seeding perennials. Make sure you get enough potting medium and peat pots for starting needs.

Start planting leeks, petunias, brachycombe, impatiens, lettuce, snapdragon, and coreopsis.

Prune grape vines, ivy, and honeysuckle. Take special care to remove ivy around shrubs such as lilac, roses, and conifers.

Notes

We invite both amateur and professional photographers to come to Deep Cut Gardens this winter and take photos of nature's wonders.

IPM Display

The Integrated Pest Management Display will be on exhibit at Turkey Swamp Park until the end of December. During January, the exhibit will again be on display at Deep Cut Gardens. □

From The Elvin McDonald Horticultural Library

An assortment of new books has arrived at the library. Come in and take a look. For now, a warm thank-you to the following gardeners for their generous donations to the library.

William T. Klapper- 10 issues, bound, 1996 "Horticulture Magazine."

Harry Cook- Several horticultural newsletters.

Florence Gundacker- Bonsai- Miniature Potted Trees, Two Brooklyn Botanical Handbooks, 15 issues of "Bonsai Journal," several bonsai pamphlets.

Peggy Leifeste- Growing & Using Healing Herbs.
Margaret Folgore- A-Z Deciduous Trees and

Shrubs; A-Z of Annuals, Biennials and Bulbs; The Garden Problem Solver; Caring for Your Plants; The Complete Book of Hardy Perennials; Every Room a Garden; The Book of Classic Old Roses; Time Life Book of Foliage House plants; The Book of Cacti and other Succulents; and eight other titles.

New to the Deep Cut video collection, for your viewing pleasure in our solarium: The Great Gardens of England, The New Garden Show #310: Water Gardening, Gardening Nature's Way- Natural Pest Control.

We are deeply indebted to these generous people who continue to help this "growing" library.

Mae Fisher, Librarian □

Send gardening questions to the Deep Cut address on the last page of this newsletter.

Classes at Deep Cut Gardens

Tuesdays	Jan. 28 - Mar. 4 Drawing at Deep Cut
Wednesdays	Jan. 29 - Mar 12 Botanical Watercolors
Jan. 26	Perennials
Feb. 2	Deciduous Trees, Shrubs, and Ornamentals
Feb. 9	Evergreens- Needled and Broadleaf
Feb. 23	Water Gardening
Mar. 2	Pruning Trees and Shrubs
Mar. 9	Hummingbirds and Butterflies In Your Garden
Mar. 16	Integrated Pest Management
Apr. 6	Lawn Care
Apr. 13	Plant Propagation
Apr. 20	Landscape Design
Apr. 27	Deep Cut Gardener's Day

Ongoing: Discover Gardening Through Video

Check the Park System's Activity Directory for these and other classes, events, and fun things to do.

Call (908) 842-4000 to register for classes and programs. For people with hearing impairment, the TDD number is (908) 219-9484.

Deep Cut Gardens
252 Red Hill Road
Middletown, NJ (908) 671-6050
Horticultural Hotline (908) 671-6906

'Friends of The Parks'

This group is committed to enhancing county-wide park activities, facilities, and services. Members receive a membership card with borrowing privileges at Deep Cut's horticultural library, subscriptions to both the Park System's Green Heritage newsletter and Deep Cut's Home Gardener newsletter, and advance notice of Friends-sponsored activities. Membership dues are \$15.00 for an individual, \$25.00 for a family, \$150.00 to become a sustaining friend and \$250.00 to become a corporate sponsor. For more information, write to: Friends of the Parks, P.O. Box 686, Lincroft, NJ 07738-0686 or call (908) 975-9735.

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Monmouth County
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Winter 1996-97
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