



## Coming Events



We are working on scheduling classes to begin in February 2023. Pruning classes and demonstrations will be first up at Buster Sykes Demonstration Orchard. What would you like to learn next year?—Just e-mail or call.

Happy Holidays!!

~Bill and Chris

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## A Moving Christmas (Tree) Story



Ten years ago, Graham's Town Hall was all decked out for Christmas but lacked just one item to make the holiday finery complete—a Christmas tree! It just so happened that at that time the Extension Master Gardeners were planning to expand Arbor Gate Teaching Garden by adding a new garden at the face of the Agricultural building. There was just one obstacle standing in the way of their proposed Hardy Tropicals Garden. A 15-foot spruce tree stood in the middle of what they hoped would become the new garden. The spruce had been planted around the turn of the century and was decorated for the holidays every year, until it became too tall even for then-director Mark Danieley to place the star on top. Not really in keeping with the “tropical” theme, it was a real dilemma for these avid gardeners to ponder. Cutting it down seemed just wrong, even if the tree were to be used to deck someone else's halls.





*No one can say an ant can't...*



Mark brought the dilemma to City of Graham Property Maintenance Supervisor Tim Covington who had a novel idea. He thought the tree could be moved! No small task considering the tree would need a root ball around seven feet wide and weigh close to 6,000 pounds! No worries! The tree was moved on Tuesday, November 27, 2012, decorated on Wednesday, and ready for the tree-lighting ceremony on Saturday, December 1! At right is a picture of the tree all decked out for Christmas this year. Luckily, the City of Graham has the right equipment and personnel to get that star up there. Below is a picture of the now well established Hardy Tropicals and Rain Gardens maintained by the Extension Master Gardener Volunteers.



*Oh! Christmas Tree!*

Thinking of buying a living Christmas tree? A couple of things to remember: Most spruce and fir species do not enjoy the summer heat here, so survival is questionable from the get-go. Bringing a living tree into your heated home will add even more stress to the plant, so keep the time indoors to a minimum, make sure the root ball stays moist, but not soggy, and turn down the thermostat as low as your family will let you.

Remember to inspect fresh cut as well as still living trees for creatures that may have sought shelter from the cold in the trees branches. Once warmed, praying mantis egg cases may hatch and slumbering Cinara aphids or sheltering spiders may seek to join your Christmas party.

Artificial trees require only that you dust them a little if they've been up since last Christmas.

Merry Christmas!

~Chris



**NC STATE****Extension  
Master Gardener***December Garden Tips*

**B**eautiful holiday decorations as close as your own backyard? Evergreen shrubs and trees such as holly and boxwood may be lightly pruned without harm to the plant this time of year. And the greenery can really 'spruce' things up! Take advantage of grapevines' running habit by taking cuttings now to coil into decorative wreaths. Make the grapevine decorations as soon as possible after cutting or the vines may become too dry and brittle to handle.

**O**verwatering is the number one cause of houseplant death in December. Be sure the soil is dry before you water, allow for drainage and save the fertilizer for spring. This goes for that favorite holiday houseplant - the poinsettia - as well. If you observe the watering rules and keep poinsettias in bright, indirect light but away from cold drafts and excessive heat, they will hold on to their cheery, colorful bracts all season.

**T**ake inventory of your leftover and saved seeds. If the seed

has been stored under cool, dry conditions, you can expect a good stand of healthy seedlings as follows: Seeds one year old or less: onions, parsley, parsnips and salsify. 2 years: corn, okra and peppers. 3 years: beans, southern peas and peas. 4 years: beets, fennel, mustard, pumpkins, rutabagas, squash, Swiss chard, tomatoes, turnips and watermelons. 5 years: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, eggplant, muskmelons, radishes and spinach.

**R**emember to keep that previously-living Christmas tree in water. Immediately before set up, cut off at least 1/2" from the bottom of the trunk to open up new pores for water. A fresh tree will drink a lot of water. You will need to check the reservoir at least twice a day for the first week it stands in your home.

**P**lant asparagus crowns between now and March 15. For a faster harvest, buy 2-year-old crowns. Choose a male of a rust-resistant variety to ensure the plant's energy goes into making new stalks and not seeds.

**I**n between holiday parties, take a few minutes to evaluate your garden's performance this year. Decide what worked and what didn't and take a few notes. Do a little garden research here:

<https://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/categories/lawn-garden/>

**F**ertilize pansies and other hardy annuals and remove spent flowers. Apply a layer of mulch to prevent frost heaving.

**K**eep bird feeders clean and filled. Use a hot pot or kettle to melt any ice that forms in bird-baths and change the water at least once a week.



Extension Master Gardeners are available to answer your gardening questions. Send your question to our e-mail address:

[askanemgee@gmail.com](mailto:askanemgee@gmail.com)

or call Cooperative Extension at 336-570-6740 and ask to speak to a Master Gardener.



*Arbor Gate Plants of the Month*

## Wintergreens



Sacred Lily *Rohdea japonica*

Cast Iron Plant *Aspidistra elatior*

Chinese Wild Ginger *Asarum splendens*

Gardening in dry shade can be a real challenge. Give up on grass—it's a losing proposition. Here at Arbor Gate Teaching Garden, we've been working for 20 years to find plants that will grow well in the dry shade provided by our venerable silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) whose roots heave the paving stones and creep into our vegetable garden beds, stealing moisture as far as they reach. The three plants pictured above have been time tested in this situation and have proven themselves to be up to the task. Even better, they provide sturdy evergreen foliage year round and spread slowly, so are not inclined to become an invasive nuisance. Use these shade lovers to fill in the shady gaps. They're not much bothered by deer or disease. The ginger and *Aspidistra* have interesting, ground-level flowers pollinated by ants and beetles and the sacred lily may surprise you with bright red berries among the leaves, but these tough guys are really specialists in all shades of green (with a touches of gold or white, depending on the cultivar.) Read more about each here:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/rohdea-japonica/>

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/aspidistra-elatior/>

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/asarum-splendens/>



*Fascinating flowers of Chinese wild ginger—look under the leaves!*