

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.



UNIVERSITY
OF
ARIZONA

the Cochise County Master Gardener

NEWSLETTER

VOL. 2, No. 1

DECEMBER 1990

THE PLANT OF THE MONTH

Peter Whitman
Staff Writer

This month we begin a new series called *The Plant of the Month*. We have decided to begin with an article about a ground cover which is often overlooked in the nursery because it is not very impressive in a one gallon can. In the ground, however, *Dalea greggii*, also known as Trailing Indigo Bush, is beautiful. The soft grey foliage and small purple flowers remind one of Texas Ranger.

The first time I read about *Dalea greggii* was in an article describing how well it did in the record frost of '78. In fact, it was one of the few plants at the University of Arizona that showed no frost damage.

Dalea, however, is excellent for desert landscaping. It tolerates heat, poor soil, is unappealing to rabbits, and is very drought tolerant. With deep watering about every two weeks, it grows very quickly. It loves full sun and high temperatures. Because of this, it is best to plant *Dalea* between June and August when growth will be the most vigorous.

The natural form of *Dalea* is very soft and appealing. With water it will fill in a large area, rooting at different points along the stems to form a full six inch deep mat. *Dalea* also responds well to pruning, which controls the growth, to form a more "sculptured" mat. Controlled growth can also be accomplished by reducing the water.

So, next time you're in a nursery, take a look at the apparently unappealing *Dalea greggii* ... you just might be surprised at how lovely it can be!!!

DEC 1990

DEC

DEC

Eric Schwen

Eric Schwen
Extension Agent.

CARING FOR HOLIDAY PLANTS

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

They arrived with the frozen turkeys in the peak of greenhouse health: brilliant red and soft white bracts, rich pink blossoms, bright deep green stems. Who can resist putting a few *Euphorbia pulcherrimas* or *Schlumbergera bridgesii* in the shopping cart? For us gardeners who have been roaming the empty nurseries looking for left-over pansies, poinsettias and holiday cactus are food for the soul. For nongardeners they are as much a part of the holidays as fruitcakes and Christmas trees.

Few of us, gardener or non, expect our holiday plants to last past January. This expectation is usually reinforced by the hundreds of foil wrapped pots found in the trash each February. However, if they are given proper care, *Euphorbia pulcherrima* and *Schlumbergera bridgesii* will not only live past January, they will bloom again every holiday season.

POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias grow to ten feet or more in their native Mexico, blooming beautifully each winter with little care. Commercial poinsettia growers use climate controlled greenhouses where they adjust temperature and light to produce blooming poinsettias on schedule. Duplicating these conditions is a sizeable challenge for the home gardener.

When you bring your poinsettia home, place it in a sunny window away from drafts or heat sources. Water carefully, keeping the soil moist, but not soggy (one Master Gardener uses ice cubes), and never let water stand in the pot bottom. If you have a humidifier and keep your home on the cooler side

(65 degrees F), the bloom will last longer.

After the poinsettia leaves drop, reduce watering and continue to keep the plant in a cool spot until spring. This is the plant's dormant period. After the last spring frost, set the plant outdoors in the sun and cut the stems back to two buds. This is a good time to move the plant to a larger pot. Poinsettias will not tolerate being transplanted during active growth, so choose a pot that you can later bring into the house.

Fertilize the plant lightly to encourage new growth. Pinch back new growth occasionally to promote bushiness. If you forget to do this and the plant gets leggy, don't try to prune it. Poinsettias will not tolerate pruning during active growth.

Your poinsettia will thrive outdoors in the summer heat if it is carefully watered and fertilized. After September, however, the plant needs constant cool temperatures (60 degrees F) and high humidity to set buds. Since this is difficult to control outside, bring the plant indoors when night temperatures drop below 60 degrees F.

The secret to successful bloom is darkness. Poinsettias require 10 weeks of short days (10 hours of full sun), and long nights (14 hours of UNINTERRUPTED darkness). Without this, the plant will not produce flowers. Move your poinsettia into a closet, or cover it with a light-tight box every evening, moving it back into the sun each morning. If you begin forced darkness in October, your poinsettia should be blooming again by Christmas.

Poinsettias are propagated in late summer by rooting stem cuttings having at least four joints or eyes.

CARING FOR HOLIDAY PLANTS

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

They arrived with the frozen turkeys in the peak of greenhouse health: brilliant red and soft white bracts, rich pink blossoms, bright deep green stems. Who can resist putting a few *Euphorbia pulcherrimas* or *Schlumbergera bridgesii* in the shopping cart? For us gardeners who have been roaming the empty nurseries looking for left-over pansies, poinsettias and holiday cactus are food for the soul. For nongardeners they are as much a part of the holidays as fruitcakes and Christmas trees.

Few of us, gardener or non, expect our holiday plants to last past January. This expectation is usually reinforced by the hundreds of foil wrapped pots found in the trash each February. However, if they are given proper care, *Euphorbia pulcherrima* and *Schlumbergera bridgesii* will not only live past January, they will bloom again every holiday season.

POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias grow to ten feet or more in their native Mexico, blooming beautifully each winter with little care. Commercial poinsettia growers use climate controlled greenhouses where they adjust temperature and light to produce blooming poinsettias on schedule. Duplicating these conditions is a sizeable challenge for the home gardener.

When you bring your poinsettia home, place it in a sunny window away from drafts or heat sources. Water carefully, keeping the soil moist, but not soggy (one Master Gardener uses ice cubes), and never let water stand in the pot bottom. If you have a humidifier and keep your home on the cooler side

(65 degrees F), the bloom will last longer.

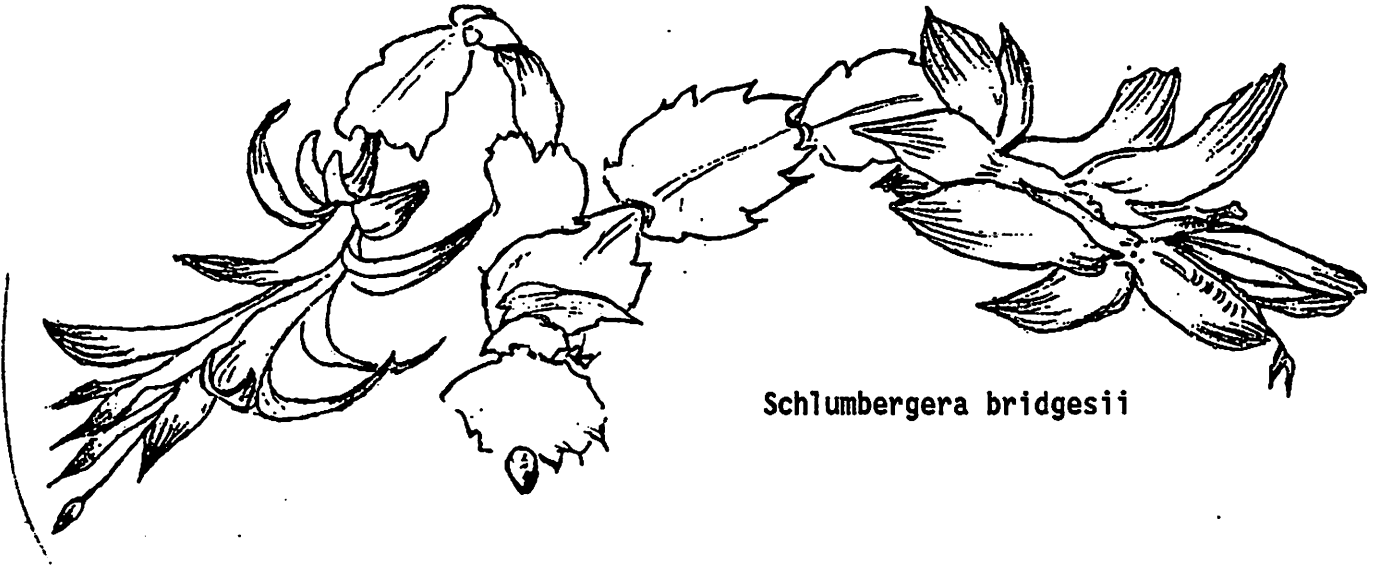
After the poinsettia leaves drop, reduce watering and continue to keep the plant in a cool spot until spring. This is the plant's dormant period. After the last spring frost, set the plant outdoors in the sun and cut the stems back to two buds. This is a good time to move the plant to a larger pot. Poinsettias will not tolerate being transplanted during active growth, so choose a pot that you can later bring into the house.

Fertilize the plant lightly to encourage new growth. Pinch back new growth occasionally to promote bushiness. If you forget to do this and the plant gets leggy, don't try to prune it. Poinsettias will not tolerate pruning during active growth.

Your poinsettia will thrive outdoors in the summer heat if it is carefully watered and fertilized. After September, however, the plant needs constant cool temperatures (60 degrees F) and high humidity to set buds. Since this is difficult to control outside, bring the plant indoors when night temperatures drop below 60 degrees F.

The secret to successful bloom is darkness. Poinsettias require 10 weeks of short days (10 hours of full sun), and long nights (14 hours of UNINTERRUPTED darkness). Without this, the plant will not produce flowers. Move your poinsettia into a closet, or cover it with a light-tight box every evening, moving it back into the sun each morning. If you begin forced darkness in October, your poinsettia should be blooming again by Christmas.

Poinsettias are propagated in late summer by rooting stem cuttings having at least four joints or eyes.



Schlumbergera bridgesii

HOLIDAY CACTUS

The Christmas cactus, *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, is one of two holiday cactus that bloom in November and December (a third blooms in spring). All of the holiday cactus are epiphytes (tree dwelling) plants from Central and South America. They are not desert plants, and need soil rich in organic matter with plenty of light and high humidity. Generally they are long-lived. Plants as old as 25 years are not unusual.

When you bring your holiday cactus home, stand the pot in a tray of moist gravel, and place it in a sunny window. Overwatering, low light, cold drafts, high temperatures, and low humidity can cause bud drop and shorten bloomtime. Do not fertilize.

After the cactus stops blooming, let the soil become nearly dry between waterings, but keep the plant in full sun. This is the plant's dormant period. Do not repot. Holiday cactus does best with slightly crowded roots, and need to be repotted only every three years.

After May you can move the holiday cactus outside, but watch the plant carefully through the dry months, and shade the plant from intense sun. Watch for yellowish or sunburned growth (too much light), or weak spindly growth (too little light). Begin fertilizing lightly every ten days.

For a Christmas bloom, leave the plant outside until night temperatures drop into the fifties. As with the poinsettia, bloom is triggered by temperature and darkness. Holiday cactus thrive in temperatures between 50 and 60 degrees F. They need 4 to 8 weeks of short days (9 hours of light), and long nights (15 hours of UNINTERRUPTED darkness) for buds to form. Move them into a closet in the evening, or place them under a light-tight box, and move them back into full sun in the morning.

Propagate in spring by placing stem cuttings in moist sand until rooted. Then move to medium of 2 parts peat moss to a part of perlite to 1 part sand.

CUTTINGS 'N' CLIPPINGS

* Garlic water is a good, natural way to rid roses of aphids. Simply soak cloves of garlic in water overnight, add a few drops of soap and spray. Watch those little creepy crawlers disappear!

* It has been discovered that dew is an important source of desert water. Desert plants often supplement, and sometimes double, their water rations with dew. Often it can equal as much as ten inches of rainfall in a year.

* In Arizona one acre of land produces about 7,500 pounds of corn. Nearly 1,304,000 gallons of water are need to grow just one crop on that acre. (SAWARA)

* It takes 32,000 gallons of water for one ton of finished steel, the amount needed to build a typical car. A thirty pound bicycle requires about 480 gallons. (SAWARA)

* Before starting on that planting hole you may want to call Blue Stake Services (1-800-362-4860) to have your utility lines mapped. The service is free, and a single call will get your electric, water, gas, phone, sewer, and cable lines marked usually within 48 hours. The marking is done with a latex-based spray paint - blue for water, orange for communications and cable, red for electric, yellow for gas, and green for sewer - and usually carries the initials for each utility. The markings, however, are not exact: they indicate only the approximate location of your utilities and never the depth. For this reason, all digging done within two feet of a marked utility line should be done "by hand" (shovels, not pickaxes). All of these precautions are designed to prevent you from accidentally severing an underground line. If you're thinking that this is an awful lot of bother for a couple of planting holes, consider this: according to Ruth Cook of Blue Stake, you are liable for any utility lines damaged during digging. Fines start at \$2,000.

AN ABUNDANT HARVEST

Jackie Dillon-Fast
MG Program Coordinator

If you call the Cooperative Extension office in Sierra Vista during the next two months, you may hear some new voices. This November we welcomed twelve new Master Gardener volunteers to the program. During December and January these new graduates will continue their training by joining experienced Master Gardeners answering questions in the Master Gardener office. They join a growing group of Cochise County Master Gardeners committed to sharing with you the secrets of high desert gardening.

The new Master Gardeners - Terry Pamela, Peter, Sandy, Debbie, George, Joanne, Liz, Drew, Betty, Karen, and Barbara - are also working on a number of gardening projects, including a workshop for school children, vegetable varieties trials, a community gardening club, a xeriscape photoessay, writing for the Master Gardener Newsletter, and growing trees for Cochise Global ReLeaf.

Please join us in welcoming these new Master Gardeners, and in thanking them and all the Master Gardeners, for agreeing to contribute their time, knowledge, and experience to other gardeners in Cochise County.

=====

ARIZONA NATURAL

High Desert Garden Club, Benson

Those towering tassels of cornstalks can form the basis of graceful swags for Christmas decoration. Tipped with gold spray, amplified with the opaque green of Hollyleaf Eleagnus - or the linear accents of Desert Broom - the swags may be embellished with pine cones, nutshells and tiny tangerine pomanders, clove-studded and tied with golden cord.

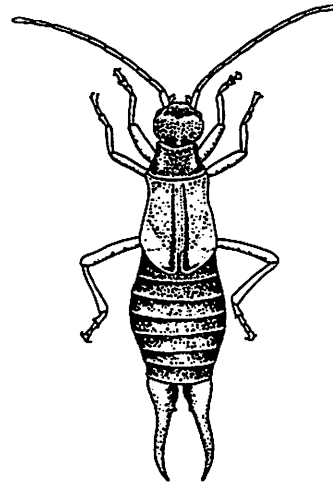
EARWIGS IN YOUR HOME AND GARDEN

T.J. Martin
Staff Writer

Earwigs are small (3/4 inch long), brown beetle-type insects with short leather-like forewings and membranous hindwings that fold up under the forewings when not being used. This insect can be readily identified by the pair of pinchers at the end of its abdomen. The small round eggs are laid in the soil and there will generally be two generations per year in our area. They overwinter in the egg stage.

The earwig is usually considered a beneficial insect, acting as a scavenger of dead or decaying material, and as a predator of other garden pests such as various insect larvae, aphids, snails, webworms, and other slow-moving pests. They are nocturnal (night) feeders and spend the day under garden litter, stones, or bark. They will produce a very strong odor if crushed.

Sometimes earwigs can become pests themselves, feeding on flowers, foliage, or seedlings. Plants usually affected include beets, beans, dahlias, butterfly bush, celery, corn, hollyhock, lettuce, potatoes, strawberries, and zinnias. They have also been known to feed on ripening fruit. One of the easiest ways to tell if earwigs are your problem is to inspect your garden at night with a flashlight. At other times they may become pests when they invite themselves into your home. Here they might be feeding on stored grain products, or they may have simply found a way in and not a way back out. According to experts, humans have nothing to fear from that pair of fierce looking pinchers on their tail end, but most folks would prefer not to find one of these creatures in their bathtub early one morning.



Adult

The most effective means of getting rid of earwigs is to trap them. During the day they seek dark, close quarters to hide in. Simply take short lengths of old garden hose, bamboo, rolled up newspapers or cardboard and lay them in your garden. Rolled or folded pieces of black plastic reportedly work well, too. Check these traps early in the day, and pour any inhabitants into buckets of water containing a bit of oil or kerosene. They can be attracted by wild lettuce, and fish oil is often used as bait in commercial traps. Domestic fowl (ducks, chickens, etc.) consider the earwig a tasty snack as do groundhogs. Earwigs are also parasitized by a Tachinid fly.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture, James A. Christenson, Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture, The University of Arizona and Arizona Counties cooperating. The University of Arizona College of Agriculture is an equal opportunity employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to sex, race, religion, color, national origin, age, Vietnam Era Veteran's status, or handicapping condition.

The information given herein is supplied with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Cooperative Extension is implied.

Any products, services, or organizations that are mentioned, shown, or indirectly implied in this publication do not imply endorsement by the University of Arizona.