

Our Holly in North Dakota

The holidays are here!

It's a wonderful time to decorate our homes with bright colors. The brilliant red berries and prickly green leaves of holly make it a popular choice for wreaths and bouquets.

It's too cold in North Dakota to grow a traditional evergreen holly, but we can grow winterberry. This holly will shed its leaves in fall, revealing bright berries in shades of red and orange. These fruits add a wonderful burst of color in winter, especially in a snowy white landscape.

Growing holly requires special care. First, there are male and female holly bushes. Only female bushes bear fruits, and they need a male bush within 50 feet for pollination. One male can pollinate approximately ten female shrubs. When you buy a female holly, a compatible male holly cultivar which blooms at the same time will be recommended.

Next, winterberry likes acidic soil, which is rare here. We need to acidify the soil to fit its needs. Start with a soil test to see the current pH. If the pH is manageable, for example 7.5 or lower, there is hope. Add an 8-inch mound of peat moss on the site and the recommended amount of sulfur for your soil. Mix this into your soil. You will need to monitor the pH to keep it acidic and your holly healthy.

Winter Red® is one of the finest cultivars. This female shrub has an



Winterberry is the holly for North Dakota. Shown is a female bush in fall and winter (top and bottom left photos, respectively) and a male bush in bloom (bottom right).

abundant display of red fruits that persist through much of winter. The rounded shrub grows slowly, reaching up to 8 feet tall. Use 'Southern Gentleman' as the male.

Compact cultivars of winterberry are available. These grow about 4 feet tall and are easy to fit into a landscape. 'Red Sprite' is highly recommended for its large, persistent, bright red berries. Use 'Jim Dandy' as the male.

Berry Poppins® is a recent release that looks promising. Mr. Poppins® is recommended as the male.

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Holiday Gifts for 2020

Ho, ho, ho! It's time for shopping!

Do you have a friend who is a gardener? Of course, you do! Here is our annual look at gift ideas for your favorite gardeners (and yourself).

Plants are always a good gift. **Succulents** are very popular today. They look charming and may be the easiest of all houseplants to grow. Wrap the pot in a festive bow and your friend will be delighted.

An **amaryllis bulb** is a great holiday gift. Your friend will be amazed on its rapid growth and fabulous flowers.

Give your friend a tool they will use often. A top-quality **trowel, pruners, dibbler** or a **pocket knife** will be appreciated for years. They make great stocking stuffers!

A **shovel** or **hoe** isn't a showy gift, but your friend will dig it (excuse the pun). Ergonomic designs are available that reduce strain on our bodies.

All gardeners need to water their garden at times. A **watering wand, lightweight garden hose**, or a **soaker hose** would be appreciated. **Watering cans** come in all kinds of colors and designs today. **Watering globes** will automatically water houseplants when needed—they even look like Christmas ornaments!

Our best tools are our hands. Protect them with a quality pair of **garden gloves** or perhaps some **hand scrubbing lotions**.

An avid gardener would love a **garden cart** to help them move plants and tools around the yard.

Nobody likes pesticides. You can help your friend grow organic food by giving them **floating row covers**.



Happy holidays!

These lightweight blankets are placed over crops. The covers allow sunlight and raindrops to penetrate through to the plants, but not bugs.

Air thermometers, soil and compost thermometers, and rain gauges provide valuable information to a gardener. Some devices act like miniature weather stations providing temperature, wind and frost warnings.

Gardeners who start their own seeds would love a **heating mat**.

Every gardener can use a **mason bee house**. These native bees are efficient at pollinating fruit and vegetable crops.

If your friend enjoys feeding birds, they may enjoy a **hanging feeder** or **suet feeder** to add to their collection. Or perhaps give your bird lover a **water heater** for their bird bath.

A **gnome** or other **gardening statue** may be a risky gift, but such gifts can bring the biggest smiles!

A set of **wind chimes** or **wind bells** can be a nice feature in the garden. Every time the wind blows,

which is always here in North Dakota, your friend will think of you.

Some gardeners prefer peace and quiet. Your friend may appreciate a set of **ear buds** to eliminate background noise and provide soothing music while they care for their garden.

Self-watering planter boxes and **raised-bed gardens** are popular. These planters make gardening easier and less time consuming.

We all need to eat more vegetables and fruits. A **juicing machine** can help your friend get the servings they need for a healthy diet. A **food dehydrator** can convert garden produce into delicious snacks.

Five-bladed **herb scissors** can cut and mince herbs from the garden.

A personalized sampler of **North Dakota honey, jellies or wines** is a special gift they will enjoy.

When all else fails, a **gift certificate** to a local garden center will put a smile on your friend's face.

Enjoy shopping and have a happy holiday season!

A 'Greener' Christmas Tree

Which type of Christmas tree is friendlier to the environment: a real tree or an artificial tree?

There is no clear answer. It depends on how you use the tree, including after Christmas. Let's discuss the pros and cons of each type.

Real Trees

Don't feel guilty about having a tree cut down for the holidays. The production of Christmas trees has positive impacts on the environment.

Christmas trees are usually grown on land that is not suitable for other crops. These trees conserve the air, water and soil on the land. Trees provide habitat for wildlife. For every tree harvested, one or more trees are planted in its place. A real Christmas tree is a **renewable** resource.

Another key point: Real trees may be **recycled** after they are used.

Christmas tree farms have negative impacts on the environment, too. Pesticides may be pollutants. The fuel used to grow and transport Christmas trees create greenhouse gas emissions.

These harmful gas emissions are partially offset by Christmas trees removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere as they grow. You can further reduce emissions created by the transportation of the tree if you buy a locally grown tree.

Artificial Trees

The greatest benefit of an artificial tree is that it can be **reused**. The energy used to make one artificial tree has been reported to be roughly equal to the energy it takes to grow six real trees. Using this as a guide, if you use your artificial tree for more than six years, you may be saving energy.



Christmas tree farms provide habitat for wildlife.

On the negative side, the manufacturing of polyvinyl chloride and metal generates greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants. The fuel used in the shipping of trees from China is another negative impact, although ocean shipping is relatively efficient.

Most artificial trees are not recyclable and end up in local landfills.

Recycle or Reuse Your Tree!

Surprisingly, the way a tree is cared for AFTER Christmas makes a HUGE difference in its impact on the environment.

For real trees, the best option is to grind them and use them for mulch. This mulch will return organic matter to the soil and build soil carbon. If this recycling service is not provided by your community, the trees can be chipped and used in a compost pile or set outside to provide habitat for birds.

Do not burn the tree. This will return all of its carbon immediately back to the atmosphere.

The most harmful way of disposing a real tree is to put it into a landfill. Materials buried in landfills will break down into methane, which is a greenhouse gas more harmful than carbon dioxide.

For artificial trees, the key to reducing its impact on the environment is to use the tree as many times as possible. If you plan on replacing the tree, consider donating it before you dispose of it.

In the end, both types of Christmas trees are okay. Studies have shown the impacts of Christmas trees on the environment are negligible in comparison to other activities related to the holiday season such as traveling and shopping.

Enjoy your Christmas tree and enjoy the holidays!

Sources:
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How to Kill Your Poinsettia

A Christmas Carol

Yes, I'm Ebenezer Scrooge. Good day to you. Are you surprised it's me? *Bab, humbug!*

I know it's the holidays—a total waste of time and money. The only thing I hate more than Christmas itself is the poinsettia I receive every year from my nephew Fred.

Let me tell you how I kill my poinsettia every year. It's a wonderful feeling, and maybe you can do the same thing this Christmas.

The dimmer, the better.

Poinsettias thrive in full sun. Since I want my poinsettia to suffer, I look for the dimmest place possible. Before you know it, the plant will lose its colorful luster and begin dropping leaves. *Good riddance, I say!*

Overwater it. My favorite way to kill a poinsettia is to drown it. The pots of poinsettias are usually

wrapped with foil. When you water your poinsettia, allow the water to remain inside the wrapping, making sure the plant is always sitting in a pool of water.

A poinsettia that sits in water will suffer from root rot. The dying roots will stop sucking up water for the plant, and the plant will start drooping.

When a plant droops, most gardeners think it needs MORE water. This is the last thing a drowning poinsettia needs. Soon, the plant will die! *Hee, hee! That foolishness brings joy to my cold, tiny heart.*

Set your plant near a drafty door or window. The cold air will cause severe stress. Exposing poinsettias to CHILLY temperatures below 60 degrees is a COOL idea. *By George, that pun was my first bit of humor in years!*



Watch your plant die—on TV.

You can literally watch your plant die while it sits near the television. The warm drafts from the TV will cause the leaves to dry out. Imagine, you can watch your favorite TV shows and during the commercials admire your suffering poinsettia! Setting your plant near a radiator or heating vent will cause similar pain. *It's delightful!*

Bab, humbug!

More Holiday Plant Care



Christmas Tree

Recut the trunk an inch or more up from the original cut and put it into water as soon as possible. Set the tree in a cool place. Keep the tree stand full of water and check daily. You do not need to add 7-Up, sugar, aspirin, or any commercially available additive to the water.



Holiday Cactus

This cactus comes from the tropical rain forest, not a desert. Water when the top inch of the soil is dry. This cactus is very adaptable but prefers warm temps (65 to 75 °F), high humidity, and bright but indirect light. The flowers will drop if exposed to drafty windows or doors, sudden temperature changes, or dry soil.

Credits

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