

# The Latest Dirt

La Porte County Master Gardener Newsletter



DECEMBER 2008

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS

## 2009 Meeting Schedule

All meetings are held on Thursdays at  
6:00 p.m. at  
The Presbyterian Church  
307 Kingsbury Ave, La Porte.

January 8	General Meeting
February 5	Awards Banquet Red Mill County Park



## A Live Christmas Tree?

### Better Look at the List to See Which Is "Naughty" and Which Is "Nice"

If you are in the market to purchase a live Christmas tree this year, Daniel Cassens, professor of forestry at Purdue University, says each variety of tree has advantages and disadvantages.

"Scotch pine has become the traditional tree because it is easy to grow and maintain, and it is well accepted in the market place," Cassens says. It has dark green needles and stiff branches that can hold heavy ornaments. It doesn't drop needles easily.

Cassens says white pine is a close second to Scotch pine in popularity. It has soft, long needles with a blue-green or silver-green color. "White pine probably doesn't hold heavy ornaments very well -- that's the biggest drawback that it has," Cassens says.

Fraser firs are popular because of the Appalachian, down-home Christmas ambiance they bring into a home, and also because the widely-spaced branches display ornaments well. The trees also are almost always a near-perfect pyramid shape, and have a great fragrance.

Douglas-fir trees have needles that are soft and dark green. Cassens says, "These trees seem to be more of a perfect cone shape and can be full, but not so full that the ornaments slide off. The branches are open enough that ornaments can be seen."

Both the Fraser fir and the Douglas fir trees are usually considerably more expensive than pine trees, according to Cassens.

Blue spruces are becoming a popular Christmas tree because of their color and their potential to be planted in the landscape after the holidays. However, spruce trees tend to drop their needles. Cassens cautions spruce buyers to really be careful to get a fresh tree, and they should not put it up early.

Additional tree choices may include Noble fir, red and Austrian pines, or others.

Cassens also offers tips for selection and care of trees.

First, Cassens suggests selecting a good tree: full all around, and the proper size. Trees in the field don't look as big as they will in a living room. Cassens says, "We like to joke that the trees tend to grow as they go through the front door."

Next, pick the freshest tree you can find. Test the tree by grabbing the needles and gently pull them toward you. On a fresh tree, the needles will stay on the tree. Some businesses can put the tree in a shaker to dislodge all of the dead and loose needles on the inner parts of branches.

Cassens suggests selecting a good location for the tree in the house. This spot would be away from heating registers, drafts and fireplaces, with easy accessibility to the tree.

Selection of a good tree stand is also important. The bigger the tree, the stouter the stand should be. Use guy wires attached to nearby window frames to ensure stability.

Just before putting the tree in the stand, make a fresh cut about one inch above the base to expose wood that can absorb water.

Finally, keep the tree watered. Ordinary tap water will work just fine.

## 2008 EXECUTIVE BOARD

## OFFICERS

PRESIDENT	ADI VEENENDAAL
VICE PRES.	RUSS KLOSINSKI
SECRETARY	ANN KLOSINSKI
TREASURER	SHARON CHOLEWA

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CAROLYN GARDNER
MARCY DAILEY
KATHY LEWIS
BARB WERNER
DONNA POUZAR
PAST PRESIDENT

## 2008 COMMITTEE COORDINATORS

## First Yard Class

Jan Koss \_\_\_\_\_ 369-6189  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [gardenotes@comcast.net](mailto:gardenotes@comcast.net)

## Habitat for Humanity

Barb Merten \_\_\_\_\_ 219-878-1337  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [barbmerten@cs.com](mailto:barbmerten@cs.com)

## Luhr Park Field Days

Jayne Sandy \_\_\_\_\_ 362-9792  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [Jayne51@yahoo.com](mailto:Jayne51@yahoo.com)

## Pioneer Heritage Garden

*Garden Coordinator:*

Sharon Cholewa: \_\_\_\_\_ 324-3637  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [stevshar@netnitco.net](mailto:stevshar@netnitco.net)

*Vegetable Beds:*

Steve King \_\_\_\_\_ 362-1034  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [sking@laportecounty.org](mailto:sking@laportecounty.org)

*Herb Beds:*

Lois Thomas \_\_\_\_\_ 326-1368  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [loismarie@csinet.net](mailto:loismarie@csinet.net)

*Flower Beds:*

Sacha Burns \_\_\_\_\_ 363-5176  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [sachabrittburns@yahoo.com](mailto:sachabrittburns@yahoo.com)

*Volunteer Coordinator:*

Jayne Sandy \_\_\_\_\_ 362-9792  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [jayne51@yahoo.com](mailto:jayne51@yahoo.com)

## 2008 Symposium

Nora Akins \_\_\_\_\_ 219-873-1735  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [targ@comcast.net](mailto:targ@comcast.net)

Sunflower Fair \_\_\_\_\_ 326-7377

Laurelle Miskowicz \_\_\_\_\_ [miskowicz@comcast.net](mailto:miskowicz@comcast.net)

Purdue Extension Office \_\_\_\_\_ 324-9407

Gene Matzat \_\_\_\_\_ [ematzat@purdue.edu](mailto:ematzat@purdue.edu)

Marcia Wolff \_\_\_\_\_ [mwolff@purdue.edu](mailto:mwolff@purdue.edu)

**Recycle Your Christmas Tree**

By B. Rosie Lerner, Extension Consumer Horticulturalist,  
 Purdue University

Though it may give you the blues to take down your holiday tree, you can find solace in recycling your tree in the landscape.

Winter birds will appreciate using the tree for cover in your backyard, especially if you decorate it with bird food ornaments. Be sure to remove tinsel, plastic and other non-recyclable ornaments.

Suet, molded seeds or disposable birdseed hangers should be readily available from garden centers and bird supply shops. Homemade treats, such as pine cones or stale bread smeared with peanut butter and rolled in birdseed, are also a hit.

You'll need to secure the trunk to the ground to prevent it from rolling away in winter winds. You can attach the tree to a stable support with wire or twine or use stakes to secure the tree to the ground.

Christmas trees can also be recycled to use as mulch around the landscape. You can chop or grind smaller branches for wood chips to use in flower, tree and shrub beds. Larger branches can be cut into smaller bundles for winter protective mulch around newly planted perennials and small shrubs. Be sure to remove the branches in spring, when the plants begin to grow again.

Many communities have special pick-up service for discarded holiday trees. Citizens can take their trees to the Zigler Road (La Porte) or Westville recycling sites for yard waste at any time. The trees are chipped up for use as mulch in parks and other city properties. Also check local newspapers, or call the local street department or La Porte County Solid Waste Management District for specific information in your area.

**Holiday Plant Care**

By Ann Wied, Extension Consumer Horticulture Educator,  
 University of Wisconsin

**Poinsettia**

Poinsettias love a bright and sunny location. Without bright light, the colorful bracts and green leaves will lose their luster and dry out quickly. In a good spot, they'll retain their color for months.

One thing poinsettias do not like are drafts. Keep them away from radiators, air registers, fans, open windows, and doorways, and don't let any part of the plant touch a cold window. If possible, place your poinsettia in a cooler room at night to extend the blooming time. A nighttime temperature of 55 to 60 degrees is ideal.

Examine the soil of your poinsettia regularly and water only when it feels dry. Always water enough to soak the soil to the bottom of the pot and discard any excess water.

## THERE IS NO MASTER GARDENER MEETING IN DECEMBER

The next General Meeting is  
scheduled for

Thursday, January 8

6:00 p.m.

The Presbyterian Church  
307 Kingsbury Ave, La Porte.

## THE AWARDS BANQUET

Thursday, February 5

Red Mill County Park  
0185 S. Holmesville Road, La Porte

Meeting 5:30 p.m.

Potluck, Awards, Pictures

# Happy Birthday!

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!

2 Kim Wright

14 Lisa Gerardi

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Election of Officers

2009 Officers and Board members were elected at the November 6 meeting. We are pleased to announce the new 2009 Executive Board:

<b>President:</b>	Russ Klosinski
<b>Vice President-</b>	Barbara Dean
<b>Secretary</b>	Ann Klosinski
<b>Treasurer</b>	Sharon Cholewa

### Board of Directors:

Marcy Dailey  
Jan Koss (new)  
Kathy Lewis  
Laurelle Miskowicz (new)

**Past President:** Adi Veenendaal

Congratulations to the new Executive Board!

### Master Gardener Holiday Lunch

By: Donna Pouzar

You are invited to the MG Holiday Lunch which is scheduled for Tuesday, December 16, 11:30 a.m. at Christo's Restaurant next to the old Maple Lane Mall (corner of State Rtes. 2 and 39).

This is strictly a social affair and not an official Association "event." It's to sit back, relax, mingle with fellow members and meet the new interns from this year's class.

If you plan to attend, please contact Marcia Wolff at the Extension Office via e-mail or phone by Friday, December 12.

Hope to see you there!

### Standing Committee Coordinators

History Book Articles and Photos	Barb Werner
Hospitality Refreshments	Eunice Conway
Librarian	Kim Wright
Newsletter	Donna Pouzar
Speakers Bureau	Rosie Flitter
Sunshine Bereavement/ Get well wishes	Sue Salach

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### "The Latest Dirt" Contributing Editors

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<i>Herbal Column</i>	Marina Studt
<i>Gardening Articles</i>	Nancy Daube
<i>Extension News</i>	Gene Matzat
Phone:	219-324-9407
E-mail:	<a href="mailto:ematzat@purdue.edu">ematzat@purdue.edu</a>

If you have an article you would like to submit to the newsletter for review, please email to:

[donnapouzar@comcast.net](mailto:donnapouzar@comcast.net)  
[ematzat@purdue.edu](mailto:ematzat@purdue.edu)

If you do not have e-mail, please mail articles to:

La Porte County  
Extension Office  
MG Newsletter  
2358 N. US Hwy 35  
La Porte, IN 46350

"The Latest Dirt"  
is published monthly.  
The next deadline is:  
December 20, 2008

## VOLUNTEER

### Request for Gardening Programs

By: Rosie Flitter  
Speakers Bureau Committee Coordinator

Master Gardeners have been asked to do periodic gardening presentations to seniors living at Oakwood Manor in La Porte. They would like the programs to be seasonal - presented in December, March and June. This will be an afternoon program scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on whatever day is decided upon for that month.

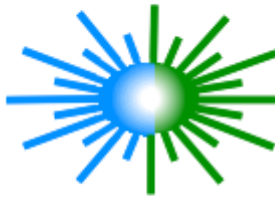
The program should consist of information on houseplant care (those residents who still "garden" have access only to houseplants), some live plants for display and demonstration, and pictures of seasonal plants and gardens. Many of the residents at Oakwood Manor are experienced gardeners who can no longer participate in outdoor gardening - this is a way to bring gardening back into their lives.

If anyone is interested in helping with this project, please contact me at 219-575-0897 or Gene Matzat. The programs should be in PowerPoint. A laptop computer, LCD projector and screen will be needed (given that this is during office hours, these should be available from the Extension office). If you do not have experience creating a PowerPoint presentation, I have the PowerPoint software and will be available to help with preparing and practicing the presentation.

This will be a great opportunity to earn MG volunteer hours and have fun doing it! I am sure that folks already involved with gardening and senior citizens will tell you that sharing your knowledge and experience with these folks will be more than rewarding - it will be anticipated and very much appreciated!

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

<b>Botanical Gardens and Master Gardener Conference Information</b>					
<b>Chicago Botanical Gardens</b>		<b>Calendar of Events</b> <a href="http://www.chicagobotanic.org/calendar/december.php">www.chicagobotanic.org/calendar/december.php</a>			
<b>Fernwood Botanical Gardens</b>		LPCMGA is a member of Fernwood Botanical Gardens. Membership card can be signed out at the Extension Office.			
Class Schedule		<a href="http://www.fernwoodbotanical.org/webdata/Calendar/Calendar.htm#Dec">www.fernwoodbotanical.org/webdata/Calendar/Calendar.htm#Dec</a>			
		<a href="http://www.fernwoodbotanical.org/webdata/education/EducatPrograms.html">www.fernwoodbotanical.org/webdata/education/EducatPrograms.html</a>			
<b>Master Gardener Seminars</b>		<a href="http://www.hort.purdue.edu/mg/events.html">www.hort.purdue.edu/mg/events.html</a>			
<b>Do It Right Series</b>					
Tues., Dec. 2	<i>What Was Hot at the Plant &amp; Pest Diagnostic Lab in 2008?</i>	11:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon	Gail Ruhl, Senior Diagnostician, Purdue P&PDL	LaPorte County Extension Office meeting room	219-324-9407
Tues. Jan. 27	<i>Invasive Plants ID &amp; Control</i>	11:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon	Glenn Nice, Purdue Weed Science Specialist	LaPorte County Extension Office meeting room	219-324-9407
<b>Other Education Opportunities</b>					
<b>Date</b>	<b>Event/Time/Fee</b>	<b>Description</b>		<b>Location/Contact</b>	
Sun., Dec. 7	<b><i>Consumer Poinsettia Open House</i></b> 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. EST Free & open to the public	Over 100 poinsettia cultivars will be featured at Purdue's Hort Department annual open house. Learn about environmentally friendly production techniques, poinsettia care, and enter a drawing to win some of the newest cultivars.		Purdue Hort Department, West Lafayette. <a href="http://www.hort.purdue.edu/">http://www.hort.purdue.edu/</a> 765-494-1300	
Sat, Jan. 24	<b><i>6<sup>th</sup> Annual Porter County Gardening Show</i></b> 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. CST	This annual event is moving to a new location – it outgrew Washington Twp School! Watch for more info at <a href="http://www.extension.purdue.edu/porter">www.extension.purdue.edu/porter</a>		Porter County Expo Center, IN 49 at Division Road, Valparaiso 219-465-3555	
Sat., Jan. 24	<b><i>Winter Day in the Garden</i></b> 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST	Five gardening experts will provide entertaining and enlightening talks on garden tools, gourds, fruit, cucurbits and birdscaping. Download a registration brochure at <a href="http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/Crawford/">http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/Crawford/</a>		Lincoln Trail College, Robinson, IL 618-546-1549	
Sat., April 4	<b><i>Spring Garden Show</i></b>	Sponsored by the Hendricks County Master Gardener Program, this annual event is a big draw for interested folks from around the state. For more info: <a href="http://www.extension.purdue.edu/hendricks">www.extension.purdue.edu/hendricks</a>		Hendricks County Fairgrounds, Danville, IN 317-745-9260	
June 30 to July 11	<b><i>The Gardens of France: Purdue Master Gardener Study Abroad Program</i></b>	This annual travel study program is going to be a real delight in 2009. For more info or a registration brochure, go to <a href="http://www.hort.purdue.edu/france">www.hort.purdue.edu/france</a>		La Belle, France  Contact Rosie Lerner for more information at 765-494-1311 or e-mail <a href="mailto:rosie@purdue.edu">rosie@purdue.edu</a>	



# CREATING TOMORROW TODAY A FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHWEST INDIANA

## OUR REGION'S FUTURE STARTS WITH YOU

Help Create a Vision for the Northwest Indiana Region of Tomorrow  
Saturday, December 6

HAVE A DIRECT VOICE in the first-ever region-wide public meeting to help plan and create a vision for the future of Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. This conversation is about you, your family, and your local community. JOIN US!

- Talk to others from around the region about the issues that matter to you most
- Help shape key decisions on how we use our region's land and handle transportation, environmental quality and economic growth
- Represent your community and speak on behalf of your neighbors

Register on line at [www.nirpc.org/futureNWI.htm](http://www.nirpc.org/futureNWI.htm) and learn more.

### State of the Art KeyPad Polling

Interactive key pad allows you to give instant feedback to the entire audience!  
Meet residents from around the region  
Free continental breakfast & boxed lunch

Saturday, December 6, 2008  
Registration and Continental Breakfast begin at 8:00 a.m.  
Event begins promptly at 9:00 a.m. & ends at 4:00 p.m.

Radisson Hotel at Star Plaza  
800 East 81st Avenue  
Merrillville, Indiana

NIRPC is a regional council of local governments serving the three counties of Northwest Indiana. The Northwest Indiana region is an integral part of the greater Chicago metropolitan area. NIRPC provides a forum that enables the citizens of Northwest Indiana to address regional issues relating to transportation, the environment and community and economic development. NIRPC is the voice of regionalism in Northwest Indiana, and a developer of consensus-backed solutions.

Requests for reasonable accessibility accommodations and/or materials in an alternate format may be directed to Mary Thorne at [mthorne@nirpc.org](mailto:mthorne@nirpc.org) or tel: 219-763-6060 TTY users may dial 711 for Relay Indiana.

## GARDENING ARTICLES

### December-January Checklist

Backyard Living on-line magazine

The heart of winter is not a time for a lot of outdoor activity. But it's the ideal time to look ahead to the coming spring and make a few plans. And in order to not feel cut off from the companionship of plants, gardeners can certainly look after houseplants—including gift plants. Keep your mind on your garden, even in this quiet season, for ideas and inspiration that can be sown or nurtured now.

- \* Prevent winter damage to your evergreen trees, hedges and shrubs. Wrap hedges with landscape netting and loosely tie branches of upright evergreens with cloth strips. This prevents snow from weighing down limbs and breaking branches.
- \* If you're planning a major new addition this year, such as a pergola, gazebo or water garden, research it now. Browse gardening books and magazines for ideas and inspiration. Give a contractor a call and talk it over.
- \* Houseplants can struggle in the low light of the winter months. Help them out by moving them temporarily to a sunnier, south-facing window. Keep the soil mix moist, but don't fertilize.
- \* Avoid the rush and shop now for seed-starting projects. Check out sterile potting mixes, containers, seed-starting contraptions, grow lights, labels and the like.
- \* Repot houseplants. Divide clumps, trim off excess growth, and set back in fresh potting soil. The plants will look nicer, but the task should revitalize them, too.
- \* Plan a new garden bed on paper. A simple sketch on plain or graph paper will do, so long as your dimensions are right. As for the plants you wish to include, be sure to research and account for their mature sizes.
- \* Some late-winter day, inspect the yard for damage. Clip or cut off limbs or branches that are obviously dead or broken. If you're not sure a branch is dead or

just dormant, play it safe, and check back later.

- \* life in it.
- \* Place your orders now with mail-order plant nurseries. They tend to work on a first-come, first-serve basis. Not to worry—they will not ship your order until it is safe to do so.
- \* Start a few flats of broccoli and cabbage. These early-season seedlings need more time to become sturdy, so they can be the first ones out in the garden when winter passes.



Christmas  
Cactus

Since Grandma's day, the Christmas cactus has been a favorite houseplant. It's not unusual for a single plant to be passed down from generation to generation because they're long-lived, rather easy plants to grow. But if you want to get them in bloom for the upcoming holiday season, they will need a little special care during the coming weeks.

Hybridization over the past century has resulted in the introduction of many new varieties of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter cactus. These plants are members of the Zygo-cactus family. Most of which are native to Central and South America. Although these plants are called cacti, they are truly different in all aspects from the common desert cactus with which we are all familiar. These plants, called epiphytes are found in the same environments as

orchids. They are most often found in the forks of tree limbs where they grow in decayed leaves and other natural debris that accumulates there. Since they are tropical cacti, their cultural requirements are totally different from true cacti. So here are a few ideas on how to care for them and the steps to follow to get them into bloom for the upcoming holiday season.

In September and October, Christmas cactus plants should be kept in a cool room where temperatures will remain around 50 degrees, give or take a few degrees. Be sure not to expose them to freezing temperatures. It's also very important they be kept in a room where no artificial light will be turned on at night.

Actually the key to getting Christmas cactus to flower during the holiday season, is the proper light exposure, correct temperatures and limited watering. So during the fall months, the Christmas cactus should be placed in a spot where it receives indoor indirect bright light during the daylight hours but total darkness at night. (Much the same exposure you would give a poinsettia except a Christmas poinsettia requires warm temperatures whereas the Christmas cactus needs a spot where the temperatures are cool during the fall months.)

Since the Christmas cactus is a tropical plant it will require watering on much the same basis as any other type of tropical plant. A good procedure to follow is to water the plants thoroughly and then allow about the top inch of soil to dry before watering again. However, during the fall and winter months, the plants should be watered less frequently in order to get them to bloom.

Christmas cactus require about 50 to 60 percent humidity. So it's a good practice to place a glass, vase or tray of water near the plant. As the water evaporates it will provide the humidity the cactus needs. A humidity tray is another method of providing the humidity the Christmas cactus requires.

This is done by filling a waterproof saucer with gravel, then adding water halfway up the gravel. Place the pot on the gravel surface.

The Christmas cactus should never be placed near a door that opens and closes to the outside. Likewise, keep it away from heating ducts or near the fireplace or drafty areas.

In late October or early November, make an application of a 0-10-10 type liquid fertilizer. A second application of this fertilizer can be made in February. During the growing season from April through September, fertilize the plants with an all purpose liquid houseplant type fertilizer. The fertilizer you use should have a nitrogen ratio of no higher than 10 percent. Of the three numbers on a fertilizer container, the first number is nitrogen..

One of the most frustrating things that can happen to Christmas cactus is after the flower buds have developed they drop off the plant. Bud drop can be caused by anyone of several different conditions. Usually it's because of over-watering, lack of humidity or insufficient light.

After The Christmas holiday season, the Christmas cactus should be given about a 30 day rest. Again place it in a cool room and provide limited water. Don't worry if it loses a few leaves or joints and appears weak during this rest period.

This is not the time to pinch, prune or shape a Christmas cactus. The best time is when the new growth begins in March or early April.

Likewise, the best time for repotting a cactus is in February, March or April. However, keep in mind the plant will flower best if it's kept in a container where it's pot-bound. If your Christmas cactus is given proper care and is placed in the right location, it's not unusual for it to flower several times throughout the year.

Source: <http://www.humeseeds.com/xmascccts.htm>