



Over the Garden Gate

Published by the Hall County Master Gardeners

President's Corner

by Patti Lewis

*'Twas The Night Before Christmas
(Gardeners' version!)*

'Twas the night before Christmas and all
through the yard
the branches were bare and the ground frozen
hard;
The roses were dormant and mulched all around
to protect them from damage if frost heaves
the ground.
The perennials were nestled all snug in their
beds
while visions of 5-10-5 danced in their heads.
The new-planted shrubs, had been soaked by the
hose
to settle their roots for the long winter's doze;
And out on the lawn, the new fallen snow
protected the roots of the grasses below.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear
but a truck full of gifts of gardening gear.
Saint Nick was the driver - the jolly old elf
and he winked as he said, "I'm a gardener
myself.
I've brought wilt-pruf, rootone, and gibberellin,
too.
Please try them and see what they do.
To start new plants, a propagating kit.
I've sparkling new shears, for the old apple tree.
To seed your new lawn, I've a patented sower;
in case it should grow, here's a new power
mower.
For seed-planting days, I've a trowel and a

dibble,
and a roll of wire mesh if the rabbits should
nibble.
For the feminine gardener, some gadgets she
loves;
plant stakes, a sprinkler, and waterproof
gloves;
A chemical agent for the compost pit,
and for pH detecting, a soil testing kit.
With these colorful flagstones, lay a new
garden path,
for the kids to enjoy, and bird feeder and
bath.
And last but not least, some well-rotted
manure.
A green Christmas year round, these gifts will
ensure."
Then jolly Saint Nick, having emptied his load,
started his truck and took to the road.
And I heard him exclaim through the motor's
loud hum
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a green
thumb!"
(Author unknown)

Write for Us!

Like to write? Have something to say? Your fellow master gardeners want to hear from you!
Email Rick at rsfreeland@charter.net for details.

Inside This Issue:

President's Corner	1
About Moles & Voles	2
Christmas Gardening Chuckles	3
Gardening Resources	3
Over-wintering Poinsettias	4

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Contributors:

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Frequently, people come to me complaining about the presence of **moles** and the damage they are causing in their landscape. After questioning them, more often than not, I conclude that the culprits are **voles**, not moles. While both are borrowing, furry rodents, they are otherwise distinctly different.

Critter Profiles

Meadow Voles (and to a lesser extent, **Woodland Voles**) are native to our region. The former perhaps is most destructive to ornamental vegetation. Both species are herbivores, with their abbreviated tails making them distinct from mice. They feed on roots, tubers and bulbs which they gain access to the by digging rather short, slopping tunnels. While adept at digging, they are no match for moles in this respect.



Moles, (including the **Eastern Mole**, most common in our area), feed on invertebrates, especially earth worms and grubs. They are well adapted to digging, using their oversize feet and sharp claws to

create long tunnels within a few inches below the ground surface. Loamy soil, and to a lesser extent, moist clay, speed their advance. I have seen moles which were able to tunnel a foot in less than a minute. Their presence and movement is evidenced by soil and sod, pushed up, forming pronounced surface ridges.



Domestic cats and wild predators such as foxes, owls and hawks perhaps offer the best means of controlling populations of moles and voles. When necessary, traps and poison baits can also be employed by the home owner or a professional exterminator.

Traps

When it comes to mole traps, I personally prefer the **jaw type** over the **spike type**. It may be necessary to use several traps if moles are active in a large area. Care must be exercised when setting traps. Positioning at the proper level is essential when jaw traps are used. Removing any stones, likely to obstruct the jaws is also important. If spike

type traps are used, stones must also be removed from where they can interfere with spike travel. When setting traps, care must be taken to minimize mole tunnel disturbance.



Spring type mouse traps can be used to control voles. Traps should be baited with pieces of apple or potato. There, however, is a risk that other rodents such as chipmunks may fall victim to these traps.

Baits

If you elect to use **poison baits** for moles, purchase one made with earth worms, such as Tomcat Mole Killer, Worm. Carefully place the bait in an active tunnel where it will not be exposed to pets. In order to verify a tunnel is being used, walk on it for a few feet. Then, a couple of days later check for evidence of the soil or sod being pushed back up.

Properly deployed, poison baits are also an effective method of vole control. If you elect to use poison bait, purchase one

labeled specifically for voles and avoid brands advertised as effective on a broad range of rodent species. Conceal traps and bait stations where voles are active.



Poison baits should be placed in a **bait stations** situated where they not accessible to pets and protected wildlife. Bait stations may be purchased or self-made. I make mine from a foot long piece of two inch diameter PVC pipe (sold in two foot lengths at home centers). A plastic plug, also available from home centers, is inserted into one end (the other end is left open) and bait is then placed at the plugged end.

What the Heck?

Allelopathy

The release of chemicals by certain plants that will prevent other plants from growing nearby. Walnut trees are known to “practice” allelopathy.



Thanks, Scribblers!

A heart-felt THANK YOU to all our intrepid contributors to Over the Garden Gate this year. Sometimes it's not easy putting your words out there for everyone to ogle, and I appreciate all those who take on the challenge. So thank you to Patti Lewis, Marcia Tauge, Kathy Lovett, and Hugo Kollmer, for sharing your invaluable insight with your fellow Master Gardeners. Looking forward to more from you guys (and anyone else who wants to contribute) in 2019.

Green Side Up

by Rick Freeland

Need science-based, peer-reviewed answers to gardening questions? Here are some **good resources** to help you serve our community better.

The Garden Professors

These guys have been around since 2009. The site was started by a group of professors in the horticultural field who recognized a need for factual garden advice grounded in real science. Professors such as Linda Chalker-Scott of Washington State University, Holly Scott of Virginia Tech, Bert Cregg of Michigan State University, and Jeff Gillman of the University of Minnesota are all active contributors. Their science-based advice can't be beat.

Check them out here:
<http://gardenprofessors.com/>

They also have a Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2mSobzG>

UGA Extension Publications

The University of Georgia offers a plethora of publications dealing with gardening. Here's one on home gardening:

<https://bit.ly/2VIT3ez>

They have information on many other topics as well. As winter is a great time for self-education, dip a finger in when you have time.

The Georgia Gardener

Walter Reeves, a.k.a. the Georgia Gardener, is well-known in our area as an excellent source of gardening advice. Reeves is a former extension agent, and knows his stuff. Check out his site here:

<http://www.walterreeves.com/>

You'll find there are countless books and websites dealing in gardening advice. Some of it you'll need to take with a grain of (Epson) salt! If you have doubts about the legitimacy of advice you

may run across, consider running it by the Garden Professors or our own Josh Presley before doling it out to the community.

Apps

Here are a few apps I use and have found to be helpful:

"Armitage's Great Garden Plants"

Created by former UGA Professor of Horticulture Allan Armitage, this is a great app for information on hundreds (maybe thousands) of landscape and garden plants.

"PlantSnap"

Need to I.D. a plant in the field? Take a photo, and use PlantSnap to do the grunt work. They have a database of over 200,000 plants, and are adding more all the time. The app will help you identify plants, and let you store info on your phone—and much more. It can be a little tricky to use, but once you get the hang of it, it's a great addition to your gardening tool box.

It takes time, dedication and a little luck, but you can successfully over-winter your poinsettias for an encore appearance next Christmas. Here's how:

Taking proper care of your poinsettia during the holiday season is the first step in ensuring that it comes back strong next year.

Poinsettias do best within specific temperature ranges—60 to 70 degrees in the daytime, and 55 degrees at night.

Place your poinsettia close to a window where it can get a little indirect sun (6 hours is about right). At night, transfer it to a cooler room, and bring it back to where you want to display it the next day.

Poinsettias are sensitive to over-watering, and may drop their bracts if they have to live with wet feet. Make sure that both the pot and the foil wrap have drainage holes. Water when the soil feels dry, and collect excess water in a saucer and empty it after each watering.

Once the colorful bracts begin to fade (around the end of February) and side shoots start to poke their heads through the old flower stems, cut the stems back to about 4" to 6" high. Leave a few leaves on each stem, as new growth will sprout from the leaf axils.

Feed your plant once a month with a liquid houseplant

fertilizer, but don't start until the poinsettia's bloom period is over.

You can move your poinsettia outdoors after your last frost date. Re-pot to a larger pot if necessary. Place the plant on your patio or deck, or sink the pot to its rim in a sheltered spot in the garden, where it can get morning sun and afternoon shade.

When August arrives, cut shoots back to around 4" high, and leave two to three leaves on each shoot.



Poinsettias don't tolerate chill well, so be sure to bring yours back indoors before first frost. Place in a sunny window, and continue to fertilize every two weeks.

A process called "photoperiodism" is what causes a poinsettia to form colorful bracts. From October 1st until the bracts start to show color (sometime around early December), poinsettias must be kept in total darkness for fifteen hours a day, from 5:00 pm to 8:00 am.

Take care that no one disturbs the plant during its "dark time". Any exposure to light can disrupt the photoperiodic process and prevent your plant from blooming. Night time temperatures of 70 to 75 degrees or above may also adversely affect flowering. To give your poinsettia its best shot at re-blooming, place a light-proof bag or cover over the plant, and then put it inside a dark closet in a cool room.

In the morning, though, bring the plant back out to soak up some sun before tucking it in again for the night.

Once the photoperiodic period is over, place your poinsettia in a spot where it will receive lots of light during the daytime. This ensures the plant develops the brightest color possible.

Over-wintering a poinsettia requires much diligence, as well as a lot of work. And the results are often disappointing. Recycled poinsettias seldom look as good as they did the first season.

Poinsettias aren't that expensive, and you may find it more practical to buy new ones every year. But if over-wintering a poinsettia is on your bucket list, there's no reason why, with a little discipline and a spot of luck, you can't bring one back for a return visit the following season.