



Trumpet Vine

Knowledge for the Community From Loudoun County Extension
Master Gardeners

Winter 2020

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LOUDOUN COUNTY EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER LECTURE SERIES

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Thursday, January 2. Matt
Bright with Earth Sangha, a
philanthropic ecological
restoration organization with
many diverse programs here
and abroad.

Thursday, February 6.
Margaret Fisher with Plant
NoVA Natives, speaking about a
new initiative encouraging
native and food plants in our
area.

Thursday, March 5. Garden
traveler Margery Erickson on
the Gardens of Spain.

For more information, visit our
website at
loudouncountymastergardeners.org.

Visit us on Facebook:
Extension Master Gardeners of
Loudoun County, Virginia.

Winter Activities for the Gardener

Winter is the time when the garden doesn't dictate your activities. You can fit your activities to your interests and your mood. Here are some ideas that you can customize to your needs and interests.

- Clean and oil your tools. Whether they are your pruners and saws or your shovels and trowels, they all deserve some attention so they will be in shape for your spring gardening activities.
- Organize, organize. Clean out your gardening tote bag, bucket, and other containers. Go through your gardening books and magazines and donate the ones you are finished with. Go through and organize your articles, brochures, and other materials in your gardening files.
- Research a plant-related topic you didn't have time to explore during the growing season.
- Read a good landscape or gardening book. You probably have some on your shelf that you have paged through but not really read. Now is a good time to sit down and read.
- Make sure you provide suet and fresh water for the birds.



2020 “Let’s Get Growing” Annual Symposium

Loudoun County Master Gardeners are sponsoring a one-day gardening symposium on Saturday, March 21, 2020. Four prominent speakers will provide inspiration, ideas, and information on environmental issues and the upcoming growing season. Please join us at our new venue, Leesburg Community Church, 835 Lee Avenue SW, Leesburg, VA 20175, to learn more as this year’s outstanding speakers share their expertise.

Dennis Dimick, retired journalist and photography editor with National Geographic



Living in the Human Age

Dennis’s work with National Geographic has included orchestrating major projects on energy, climate change, soil conservation, global freshwater, world population, and the future of food security. Dimick lectures on the emerging Human Age or Anthropocene epoch, and his new Eyes on Earth project with photographer Jim Richardson emphasizes seeing the Anthropocene and its meaning.

Sam Droege, wildlife biologist at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, U.S. Geologic Survey



Native Bees Up Close

Sam will introduce us to the native bees of our area, their fascinating habits, the plants they prefer, and how to make your property welcoming to native bees. Sam is widely published in journals and has been the editor of numerous publications on birds and insects. Currently his team is running an inventory and monitoring program for native, along with online identification guides for North American bees at www.discoverlife.org. He is a frequent speaker and gave a June 2017 Ted Talk on native bees.

Ira Wallace, worker-owner of the cooperatively managed Southern Exposure Seed Exchange



Grow Great Vegetables in Virginia

Learn tips and techniques for growing garden-fresh salad ingredients, vine-ripened tomatoes, crisp green peppers, and dozens of other delicious edibles year round in your Virginia garden. Ira will cover soil building, planting dates, succession sowing, mulch, water management, the selection of best varieties, and more for abundant harvests across the state. Her current book is, *The Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast*.

Ginger Woolridge, landscape architect, garden consultant, and writer



Native Trees and Shrubs

Woolridge is coauthor with Tony Dove of *Essential Native Trees and Shrubs for the Eastern United States: The Guide to Creating a Sustainable Landscape*, published in 2018. This authoritative catalog of 85 native species highlights the attributes of native plants and their importance in the food web. Ginger will discuss the benefits of native trees and shrubs and their resilience in the face of a changing climate.

Online registration opens February 1, 2020. Tickets that include a box lunch are \$72; tickets without a lunch are \$60 if you choose to bring your own lunch.

See our website for more information and registration beginning February 1.

<http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/annual-symposium/>

***Cyclamen persicum*—The Florist's Cyclamen**

SIGH-kla-men (preferred) or SIK-luh-men (alternate pronunciation)

We're all familiar with the florist's cyclamen, widely available during the Christmas season in florist shops, nurseries, and grocery stores. With their dark green heart-shaped leaves, often variegated and marked by silver blotches or veining, and flowers of pink, rose, red, purple-lavender, or white, they are a welcome sight during the dark days of winter.

Although in our grocery stores we frequently generally see standard cyclamens, about six inches wide by about 10 to 12 inches tall, they come in several other sizes as well, suitable for almost



The two white cyclamens are each 7 inches tall; the red one is 15 inches tall.

any spot in the house, including the most narrow windowsill. Breeders have now developed mini-cyclamens (four to six inches tall) and micro-cyclamens (three to four inches tall) for *really* small spaces, all the way up to mammoth cyclamens (up to 16 inches tall). These may still be hard to find, but they do exist!

The solitary nodding flowers themselves are fascinating to study. The flower stem is bent just as it joins the flower at a 150° to 160° angle so that the "nose" of the flower faces down, with its five reflexed petals facing upward. In

the species, the flowers are quite small, the flower color range is narrower, and the petals are frequently twisted, sometimes up to 360°. In cultivation, breeders over the past 150 years have vastly increased the size of the flowers, bred the twisting out of the petals, and introduced new colors, including bicolors. Double cyclamen and cyclamen with fringed petals are now available, as are those with variegated petal colors. In the breeding process, unfortunately, the flowers have lost the fragrance found on flowers in the wild. Efforts are now being made to reintroduce fragrance to the cultivated varieties, with some success.

Florist cyclamens are hybridized descendants of *Cyclamen persicum*, native to the eastern Mediterranean region, especially southern Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and northern Israel. They also occur in North Africa (Tunisia, Algeria) and on several of the Greek islands, particularly Cyprus, Rhodes, and eastern Crete in the eastern Aegean Sea, between Turkey and Greece. Although they are not endangered, Israel has declared them a protected species, and they are found abundantly in parks, where in some places, such as the Alobei Yitzhak Nature Reserve, they can be found by the millions.



Note the twisted petals on this wild cyclamen. Photo by Magnus Manske - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10220344>



Cyclamens growing wild in Israel. Photo by שיך זינה-יוסף, CC BY 2.5,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18201395>

In their native habitat, cyclamens generally grow on open rocky slopes, in rock crevices, under shrubs, and in old olive and oak groves, where they withstand hot, dry summers by going dormant. Warm, rainy, humid winter weather brings on new growth and blooming begins. They generally grow on what is called *terra rossa* soil (literally, red soil), which is extremely well drained, clayey to silty clay soil with a neutral pH, generally found over limestone or dolomite rocks. As you would expect from plants growing in this kind of soil, they prefer soil with a pH range of 6.0 to 6.5.

Cyclamens aren't difficult to care for. If you give them their preferred growing conditions, each flower will be

long-lasting (up to three weeks), new buds will continue to rise from the tuber, and the plant will bloom for four to six weeks during the winter, generally from December through early spring, perhaps as late as April, depending on growing conditions, before it starts to go dormant as spring approaches.

Selecting: When you select your cyclamen, choose one with lots of buds, for a prolonged period of blooming. While if happy they will continue to set more buds, it's nice to start out with a lot of buds already formed. Check the interior of the plant to see if any cut stems are there, indicating a plant that has had fading flowers removed and may be past its prime. (No, they should not have been cut, but retailers do it, for lack of time!) And, of course, always check under the leaves for insects before you bring it home, as you would do for any houseplant.

Transporting: Cyclamens are temperature sensitive plants. Try to buy them on a warmer day, if possible--not on a day when it's 20° F, with a wind chill of 10° F. Even on a warmer day, if it's below about 50° F, make sure the plant is wrapped in a plastic sleeve or paper bag before you take it outside.

Lighting: Once at home, give your cyclamen a bright place to live, but not one that receives hot, direct sun. A north window where it gets indirect light is perfect; east or west windows will also be fine. A south window, however, will be too bright, and the blooming life of the plant will be shortened. On the other hand, if it receives too little light (for example on a table away from a window), leaves may turn yellow and eventually droop. It's OK if you move it there for a party. Just be sure to move it back to its favored location within a day or two.

Temperature: Temperatures on the cool side (but not below 50° F) are preferable; 50° to 55° F at night and 55° to 65° F during the day is ideal, although 68° F is acceptable. If kept too warm, flower buds may fail to develop, flowers won't last long, leaves may yellow, the leaf petioles and flower stems will stretch and flop over and while it won't die, the plant will be unattractive and go into early dormancy. Mini-cyclamens will tolerate somewhat higher temperatures.

Watering: One of the worst things you can do to a cyclamen is overwater it. They *really* don't like to be waterlogged, and it's important to keep the water off of the top of the tuber, which can cause both the tuber and the stems to rot. Water the plant as soon as the soil feels dry to the

touch, generally about two to three times a week. In other words, let the soil *almost* dry out totally before you water it, but not so dry that the plant begins to wilt or become limp. Be particularly careful in watering mini- and micro-cyclamens. They are grown in very small pots and dry out quickly. (If you do cross that line and the plant wilts, water it thoroughly and lay the pot on its side for an hour to encourage the flowers to resume their upright positions.)

You can water it in one of two ways:

- For larger sizes, use a watering can with a long spout and *slowly* water around the edges of the pot so the water absorbs and doesn't sit on the soil surface, and definitely does not soak the center of the tuber or leaves at the base. Mini- and micro-cyclamens are generally purchased in very small pots. I find them easier to water with an oral syringe from the pharmacy.
- Set the plant in a basin of tepid water for *no more than* 15 minutes, allowing soil to slowly absorb the water from the bottom upward. Remove from the water and let it drain thoroughly before you place it back in its saucer. For miniatures, soak for only a very few minutes.

While they don't like overwatering, cyclamens *do* like humidity. Some people supply this by placing the pot on pebbles in a tray containing a little water, definitely not enough to actually touch the pot, but just enough to keep the air around the plant humid. I keep mine in a north kitchen window over the sink, where it's cool and gets plenty of indirect light. I use this sink constantly during the day, so the area is fairly humid. I've had great success with cyclamen in that spot.



It's easier to use an oral syringe to water the mini-cyclamens.

Grooming: As flowers fade (and the occasional leaf yellows), remove them by reaching with your fingers down to the base of the plant, at the tuber, grasping the stem, and gently twist and pull it away from the tuber, being careful not to tear the tuber. Don't cut with scissors--that leaves an open stem through which botrytis and other diseases can enter the tuber.

Fertilizing: It's not absolutely essential to fertilize your cyclamen, especially if you don't intend to try to save it for the following year, but growers recommend that you do so anyway, using a bloom-boosting formula such as 10-30-20. If you're going to let the plant go dormant and save it, you really *do* need to fertilize it once every two weeks with a liquid pot plant food. Keep fertilizing until the foliage dies as the plant goes dormant for the year. Then stop.

Dormancy: Florist's cyclamens go dormant in the summer, beginning the process at some time in late spring when they start to lose their leaves. At this point, gradually decrease watering. Stop fertilizing. Eventually most, possibly all, of the leaves will die back, leaving just the tuber. Pull off any remaining leaves. Place the pot either inside in a cool, dry, dim place or on a shady porch

where rain won't hit it. As to watering during dormancy, there are two schools of thought: The first says don't water. Period. The second says water very occasionally, and only slightly. Apparently both methods work equally well, but I haven't compared them. In any case, remember: they're natives of the hot, dry Mediterranean region, and in that environment, water is scarce during the summer.

Repotting: The first year your cyclamen probably won't need repotting, but of course you can, using a 6- to 8-inch pot for a standard tuber. If you have a mini- or micro-cyclamen, it will be easier to water and care for if you do repot it in a slightly larger pot than the tiny one you purchased it in. You can repot any time after it goes dormant, up to about July, when the first new fingers of roots start to grow from the base. Note: It's very difficult to repot an actively growing cyclamen. Do it early! Use a good potting soil or if you have a favorite recipe, you can mix your own. Plant the tuber with about one third of the tuber *above* the soil line. Continue care as you would for a dormant plant--because it *is* dormant.

Breaking Dormancy and Reblooming: In September or October, tiny new leaves should begin to emerge. If not, give it a little water to start the process. Once leaves start to grow, resume regular watering and fertilizing and place the pot in a north window to continue growing and, hopefully, flowering for another year.

In nature, *Cyclamen persicum* is perennial and blooms for many years. In pots in our home environments, however, the second year's bloom rarely is as abundant as it was the first year, but it nevertheless will be pretty. Don't try to carry the plant over to a third year. It's rarely a successful endeavor.

Lina Burton, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener



Cyclamen persicum 'Victoria' with ruffled, bicolored flowers. Photo by David J. Stang.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyclamen_persicum_Victoria_1zz.jpg

Hawks of Loudoun County

Hawks make up the largest group of raptors (birds of prey) and are one of the largest bird families, as well as the most diverse. They are found on all continents except Antarctica. True hawks have long, broad wings and short, broad tails. They soar when in flight, often over fields and through forests. They are built for flight, from the skeleton outward. Even though their bones are strong, they weigh very little. They are strong and light, which lends to their success as aerial predators. They have large eyes, an important tool for a flying hunter. The wings of the hawk are designed for different kinds of flight to suit their different prey. For instance, true hawks have wide, rounded wings that help them to soar above fields while they search for rabbits, mice, or other prey.

Hawks catch and eat live creatures or feed on carrion. They rely on meat as their food source, killing mostly with their feet and carrying prey in both feet. They hunt nearly every kind of living thing including insects, reptiles, small mammals, small birds, and lizards. They use both their beaks and their feet as their major means of catching, killing, and eating food. Both are strong and sharp. The beak is the heaviest part of a raptor's head. The upper mandible is long, curved, and hooked. Hawks use their beaks mostly for tearing apart their prey once they've caught it with their feet. They don't use their beaks for killing; this avoids having their eyes or head injured by a fighting mammal. Their eyes are their most important tool. The vision of raptors is two to three times the strength of human vision. This allows them to see their prey from a great distance.

Birds of prey do their hunting alone, but even these solitary hunters sometimes hunt in pairs and share their kill. One bird chases or scares the prey while the other swoops in to grab the animal as it is trying to escape from the first hawk. Two or even three hawks may work cooperatively to chase and tire their prey. Birds of prey use three main hunting approaches. Although some species may be specialized, most use all three approaches at one time or another. These three approaches are from the air, from perches, and on the ground.

By the mid-20th century, many raptor species had declined precipitously. Direct persecution and pesticides had taken a heavy toll. However, decades of protection have caused populations to rebound and to reclaim habitat. Hawks have also moved into suburban and urban areas. It's a trend reported (often via citizen science) around the country. And a big part of it is the bird feeder in your backyard. The researchers found that a predator's persistence in urban areas was most influenced by abundant prey. Based on citizen science and other research across the country, hawks have taken advantage of the bounty of bird feeders across the continent. Some studies have found that urban hawks are feeding heavily on European starlings, house sparrows, and pigeons--all non-native species.

Hawks in Loudoun County, including the Cooper's hawk, the red-shouldered hawk, and the red-tailed hawk are all on the increase. Cooper's hawks are found in a variety of habitats and nest readily in towns. Red-tailed hawks are our most common hawk, found almost everywhere. Red-shouldered hawks live in mature forests and hunt small prey--mainly from perches. As hawks that like to hunt in open fields, red-tailed hawks are conspicuous and can be spotted regularly in trees and on wires along Loudoun's roadways. Of the three most common hawks in the Loudoun County area, the red-tailed hawk is the easiest to observe on a regular basis. Where hawks choose to live is based on two major factors: food and nest sites.

Cooper's Hawk

Cooper's Hawk.
[Photo, Wikipedia.](#)

Cooper's hawks are crow-sized birds, approximately 1.2 pounds, steely blue gray above with warm reddish bars on the underparts and thick dark bands on the tail. As with all hawks, the female is larger than the male. Juveniles are brown above and crisply streaked with brown on the upper breast. Cooper's hawk males typically build the nest and provide the food for the female and three to five young. Their calls are a harsh-sounding "kek kek kek."

Cooper's hawks capture prey using the element of surprise, perching quietly, then bursting from cover on foot or zipping through dense vegetation on the wing in pursuit. They prey almost exclusively on small to mid-sized birds, ranging from American robins and northern flickers to mourning doves. They also eat many small mammals, such as chipmunks, tree squirrels, ground

squirrels, mice, and bats. Cooper's hawks are well-known for hunting songbirds at backyard feeders, particularly during the winter months. Cooper's hawks are sometimes called chicken hawks.

Red-Shouldered Hawk

Red-Shouldered Hawk. [Photo, John Eppler.](#)

A red-shouldered hawk is slightly larger than a Cooper's hawk and averages 1.5 pounds. A male and a female red-shouldered hawk will construct a 2-foot-wide stick nest, often just off the main trunk of a deciduous tree. They will add branches and leaves to line the nest until the three to four young fledge (approximately 5 to 7 weeks after hatching). Incubation is mostly by the female, with the male bringing her food to feed the nestlings. The young are fed by the parents for another 8 to 10 weeks after fledging. The adults return to the same nesting site year after year.

Red-shouldered hawks are typically a sign of tall woods and water. It's one of our most distinctively marked common hawks, with barred reddish-peachy underparts and a strongly banded tail. In flight, translucent crescents near the wingtips help to identify the species at a distance. These forest hawks hunt prey ranging from mice to frogs and snakes. They usually hunt by watching from a perch, either within a forest or out in the open, swooping down when they locate prey. They sometimes fly very low in open areas, taking creatures by surprise. They may use hearing as well as sight to locate prey.

Red-Tailed Hawk

Red-Tailed Hawk.
[Photo, John Eppler](#)

Red-tailed hawks are large, averaging 2.4 pounds; when seen from a distance, you might think you see an eagle. They create a large stick nest, built by both members of the pair, near the tops of tall trees. This provides a perch from which to aggressively watch over their territory and hunt. Once paired and the nest is built, the female lays one to five eggs. The young of the red-tailed hawk fledge almost 2.5 months after incubation starts. A pair of red-tailed hawks raises one brood per season, and the pair typically stays together until death.

The red-tailed hawk is a bird of open country. Look for it along fields and perched on telephones poles, fenceposts, or trees standing alone or along edges of fields. You'll most likely see a red-tailed hawk soaring in wide circles high over a field. Its flapping wingbeats are heavy. In high winds red-tailed hawks may face into the wind and hover without flapping, eyes fixed on the ground. They attack in a slow, controlled dive with legs outstretched. The diet of red-tailed hawks is highly variable and reflects their status as opportunistic generalists. In North America, the red-tailed hawk is most often a predator of small mammals such as rodents. Prey that is terrestrial and active during the day is desirable to these hawks, so types such as ground squirrels are preferred where they naturally occur.



Red-tailed hawk used in falconry.

Photo by [Robert Scheer](#).

Because they are so common and easily trained as capable hunters, the majority of hawks captured for falconry in the United States are red-tails. Falconers are permitted to take only passage hawks (those that have left the nest, are on their own, but are less than a year old) so as to not affect the breeding population. Adults, who may be breeding or rearing chicks, may not be taken for falconry purposes and it is illegal to do so. Passage red-tailed hawks are also preferred by falconers because these younger birds have not yet developed the adult behaviors that would make them more difficult to train.

Raptors have evolved to be one of the most successful groups of animals on the planet. They have keen eyesight, strong legs, and sharp talons; they are powerful fliers. Birds of prey, like other predators, are at the top of a complex food chain. If their food source or some other component is removed, the whole food chain is disrupted. From development to global warming, hawks face a wide variety of threats to their existence. Natural causes of death--such as disease, wounds, and starvation--make mortality high among birds of prey. On average, more than 50 percent of all juvenile raptors die in their first year out of the nest. When raptors must compete with humans, many birds wind up losing, and some species become endangered and even extinct. Despite the fact that they are currently on the rebound, rapid development in the area and environmental changes could once more cause their numbers to decline. Hawks keep in check the rodent population (vectors of Lyme disease), play an important role in the area food chain, and provide us beauty and grace in our environment.

Heather Keith Swanson, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

PORTUGAL.....in a class all its own!

A memorable river cruise up the Douro River revealed stunning hillside terracing and groves of olive trees. Given the rolling, mountainous terrain and rocky soil, one must appreciate the determination of the Portuguese people to make the most of what nature has provided. This country shares our love of gardening, but in an obvious, more relaxed way where not everything must be perfectly groomed. Come see.....

We'll begin with a lazy cruise down the river where one witnesses the labor of love, not to mention the toil to provide a livelihood, in the massive expanse of olive orchards and vineyards literally carved into the mountainous hillsides; these very productive plantings thrive in the warm, dry climate.



Pinhao, Portugal.

All photos by Pam McGraw.

From afar, one observes the serene beauty, but a closer view reveals the artistry...



The Quinta da Aveleda Manor and Winery, owned by the Guedes family for centuries, is surrounded by lush gardens and rustic architecture; we enjoyed a leisurely tour of the grounds and sampled their renown "green wine" (Vinho Verde), sold a brief three to six months after harvest. Its many features included a stately entry, a lovely pond created and maintained without worry of its "greening," ancient walls leading from one garden "room" to the other, and a most interesting iron fence that demanded my touch to authenticate. The more natural approach to maintenance and design is apparent.





One may not depart the garden without giving homage to the cork tree. It is Portugal's most unique and valuable income-producing product from which pocketbooks, trivets, hats, wallets, corks (of course), flooring, and many other items are made. Its cork bark may be carefully harvested the first time when it is 25 years of age, again in another nine years, and in another nine years, etc. This evergreen tree may live 200 years and be harvested as many as 16 times. The Portuguese jokingly say they plant a cork tree for their grandchildren as it takes that long to harvest! The bark is quite beautiful, rich in color and texture.



As we were leaving, the "hedge" of perennial geranium (Cranesbill) was prominent and wisely incorporated into the landscape. Somehow its use seems to escape American gardeners!

We move on to Queluz to the rococo palace, which featured once lavish gardens that now struggle for lack of funding. The designs, while once quite beautiful, are now sparse of healthy occupants, but its formal design and statuary are notable.



Salamanca featured one of the most vibrant and attractive town centers, adjacent to its famous university, founded in 1134 and one of Europe's oldest. It provided a cool, lovely retreat from the warm weather and was one of the few areas heavily landscaped with flowers. The town retains a traditional Spanish village feel.





Charming Lamego exhibited a town well-loved, immaculately groomed and full of activity, clearly a focal point for social gatherings. Its cathedral (upper right) features a hilltop chapel that can be reached via 686 steps up a grand staircase; pilgrims often made this journey on their knees.



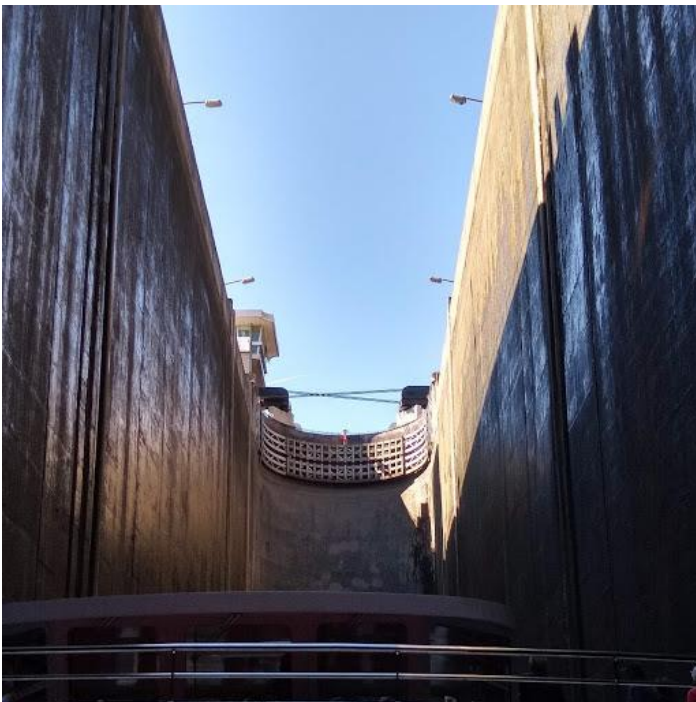
This most interesting tree was simply amazing. Its species was unknown by our guide, but the respect given to it was obvious by the protection it was afforded.

As we progressed down the Douro, the mountainous slopes of Vila Marim appeared both wild and tamed, but stunningly beautiful. Within the settled areas, attention was given to more formal landscaping, most often around tourist stops and museums. At a restaurant adjacent to the gardens shown in the lower right photo, we were introduced to Fado, a music genre traced to Portugal since 1820s; it is a form of music characterized by mournful tunes and lyrics, often about the sea or the life of the poor and infused with a sentiment of resignation, fatefulness, and melancholia.





This tree, like many others, was exiled to a courtyard of nonpermeable surfaces, but seemed to thrive—at least for the present.



Though not a garden, this photo could not escape inclusion as it exemplifies the nature of the Douro River, once a raging, rapids-filled, fast-flowing body upon which Portugal's precious Porto (port) wine was transported to the detriment of the many who died in the effort of transport. To tame the Douro, many locks were created, including the one shown at a depth of 150 feet. It was strange and a bit eerie to see the tall walls rise above the ship's sides, the huge concrete doors part, and the water begin to flow in and raise us once again to the river's level.

Intentionally excluded were the many historic cathedrals we visited, coastal Cascais, and scenic Sintra whose cloud cover made capturing its beauty impossible. Indeed, the Tile Museum in Lisbon was most worthy of our time as well. These treasures of Portugal, aside from its geographic distinctions, make this a country to visit!!

Pamela McGraw, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

What? Sow Seeds in the Winter?

Do you want to increase the number of native plants you have without spending a large amount of money buying plants, or experience the fun of growing your own? If you have some patience and like to experiment, try growing native plants from seed. You may gather seeds from the wild if they are plentiful and you only take a small amount, from a friend's garden, or buy from an online provider. If you are gathering seed, it may be more challenging than you think to determine exactly what the seed looks like. Searching online for seed images can be good prework before you go out to gather seed. This time of year, you may want to buy seed online. Regardless of what plant seed you are looking for it's best to search online using the botanical name. So instead of searching for ironweed or golden ragwort, it's best to search for *Vernonia* or *Packera aureus*. Then, you will be sure to get what you want, no mix-up with common names.

Once you get some seed, you'll need to determine when to plant. And that time might be now—winter! Seeds of native plants have a different set of needs than those of vegetables or common garden annuals. We are accustomed to sowing vegetables and annuals in the spring. But for many native plants, the best time to sow seed is fall or early winter. Native seeds mature and drop to the ground in the summer or fall; they need some mechanism to prevent them from germinating and beginning to grow in the fall when the tender seedlings will be killed by frost or other harsh conditions. Different seeds have different requirements for germination.

A good source of germination information is the catalog or website of Prairie Moon Nursery. This company has most every native plant you could want. Look up the plant on the website and germination information will be provided. Each germination method has a "code" from A through M. Some very small seeds must be sown on the surface of the soil because they need exposure to daylight to break dormancy and germinate. Other seeds require two years of alternating conditions to germinate. Many plants have two or three germinations codes. For example, Jewelweed, *Impatiens capensis*, has codes F, L, and M. **F:** Seeds need a cold, moist period followed by a warm, moist period followed by a second cold, moist period. **L:** Plant fresh seeds or keep moist. Refrigerate until planting or starting other treatment. **M:** Best planted outdoors in the fall.

The majority of seeds require a cold, moist period that ranges from 30 to 90 days; most seeds require at least 30 days, followed by warm temperatures when the seeds will germinate. This can be accomplished using moist sand and seed in a sealed plastic bag in a refrigerator, or much easier, simply sow the seed outdoors now. You may sow in a large container, in a window box, or directly in the soil where you want them to grow. That way you don't have to worry about maintaining the proper moisture in the refrigerator or planting at the right time in the spring.

If you don't find the information you are looking for on the Prairie Moon website, simply conduct a web search. For example, Prairie Moon does not sell paw paw seeds and that information can be gotten through a direct web search. Incidentally, paw paw germination can benefit from scarification or scratching the hard seed covering with coarse sandpaper. New Jersey Tea, *Ceanothus Americana*, seed will germinate after boiling water is poured over it and the seeds are planted in the spring. As you can see, native seed germination is an interesting subject in itself. Some plants are still keeping their seed germination requirements secret!

Carol Ivory, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Hellebores--A Wonderful Addition to the Winter Garden



Picture courtesy of [Pixabay](#).

Hellebores are revered by seasoned gardeners for their long bloom time, reliability, and tolerance of a wide variety of light and soil conditions. They provide rich foliage all winter long and flowers in mid and late winter.

Hellebores grow well here in Loudoun County. The plants are surprisingly frost-resistant, and most are even evergreen depending on our winter weather. And as a bonus, they are pretty much left alone by wildlife. The leaves tend to be leathery with some having spines or cut

edges. Some species have stemless flowers and leaves, both arising straight from the ground.

Some of the earlier varieties have inconspicuous flowers; what we think are petals are actually the sepals with most being white, cream, and pink. But with all the hybridizing of this genus, your choices of color and number of petals have grown tremendously. There are whites, pinks, burgundies, greens, and black; there are spotted, speckled, ruffled, and doubles galore.



Picture courtesy of [Pixabay](#).

Some people think the Christmas rose and the Lenten rose are the same. They are actually two different species of the genus, blooming at two different times of the year. They are the two most common species grown; *H. foetidus* or "stinking hellebore" is a slightly less common species.

A Bit of History

The use of hellebore dates back to 1400 BCE when it was used as a purgative to "cleanse the mind of all perverse habits." It is found in writings through the ages, from the ancient Greeks through the Middle Ages, when it was used by herbalists.



Sandy Shores--picture courtesy of Walters Garden.

It has been used for animal ailments, to bless animals and keep evil spirits from them, to repel flies, to "purge the veins of melancholy, and cheer the heart," or even in one superstition to make oneself invisible if scattered in the air!

I'm not sure using a purgative would cheer my heart, but one never knows!

The word hellebore comes from the Greek words "elein," meaning to injure, and "bora," meaning food. The members of this genus are highly toxic, considered one of the four classic poisonous plants along with nightshade, hemlock, and aconite.

But How Did the Common Names Come About?



Wedding Bells. Photo courtesy of Walters Garden.

Hellebores can be categorized as Christmas (niger) roses and Lenten (orientalis) roses, depending on when they bloom. One of the legends as to how the Christmas rose came to be is about a country girl named Madelon. Madelon is sad because she has nothing to give the Christ child she has come to visit in Bethlehem. The story goes that an angel sees her sadness and brings the girl outside and touches the ground. Where the angel touches the ground, a hellebore arises and blooms--a gift to present to the baby Jesus and thereby getting the name Christmas rose.

The rose part is easy; the flowers somewhat resemble a single rose. Lenten came from the fact the Lenten roses bloom in the north in the late winter and early spring--the Lenten season.

Care and Use

Hellebores are fairly easy to care for once established. They are a shade-loving plant and can handle deep shade as well as dry soil (once established), which makes them an ideal perennial for planting under trees. Hellebores don't like to be planted too deeply--another advantage when planting under trees. An annual topping of compost and trimming of old foliage at the end of winter is about all the care they need.

They also grow well on hillsides and slopes. Since they are low (12 to 18 inches high), and flowers are at or below the leaves, they are better appreciated if placed in raised beds, along walks, or on slopes. The flowers can also be cut and enjoyed inside.

Plants are slow to get established, but once they are, they seldom need division. If you do want to divide or transplant them, September or October is best. Dig the whole plant, wash off soil, then divide with a sharp knife between growth buds. Leave at least three buds on each division.



True Love. Photo courtesy of Walters Garden.

When handling hellebores, keep in mind that all parts of the plant are toxic; poisoning is rare but it does occur. This is why deer and rabbits leave them alone. Poisoning can happen through ingestion or coming into contact with the sap. Skin irritation may occur when handling the plants, though I have planted several and haven't had any problems at all.

For more pictures and information check out this article from *Garden Design* magazine "How to Grow Hellebores," which includes a slide show of different varieties.

Becky Phillips, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Winter Pruning

Winter is the best time to prune many types of plants in our landscapes. Pruning improves a plant's appearance. Correct pruning promotes plant health and encourages flower and fruit development. Pruning hazardous trees protects you and your property. Timing and techniques are important in pruning. Generally, late fall, winter, and summer are the best times for pruning trees and shrubs. Late winter, while plants are still dormant, is the ideal time for pruning many trees and shrubs. Pruning wounds are exposed for a short time before new growth and healing begins and you can see the structure of a deciduous plant before leaves obscure it. Prune apple trees (*Malus pumila*), flowering crabapples (*Malus spp.*), and cotoneasters (*Cotoneaster spp.*) in late winter to reduce the chance of the bacterial disease, fireblight. Prune maple (*Acer spp.*), birch (*Betula spp.*) and walnut (*Juglans spp.*) trees also in late winter, because they have free flowing sap that 'bleeds' when they are no longer dormant. It is important to prune oak, especially trees in the red oak group, while they are dormant to prevent insects from entering pruning wounds and transmitting oak wilt. For flowering trees and shrubs you should follow these guidelines: If it's spring flowering (i.e., blooms before May), prune it after it blooms. Examples are azalea, dogwood, loropetalum, spirea, and forsythia. If it's summer flowering (i.e., blooms after May), prune it before new growth begins in the spring. Examples are crape myrtle, hibiscus, and hydrangea. Evergreens such as hollies, boxwoods, cedars, juniper, and others should be pruned during the dormant season (mid-November to late February). Fruit-producing and berry-producing plants like hollies, nandina (a non-native invasive that you should avoid planting), mahonia, and pyracantha should be pruned after the berries fall or are eaten by birds. On most plants, light corrective pruning can be done at anytime. Prune a diseased plant at any time of the year. Remove the diseased parts as soon as you notice them. Sanitize your tools in a ten percent solution of household bleach (one part bleach to nine parts water) to prevent the spread of infection.

It is futile to try to keep a large tree or shrub small by pruning because it will always strive to grow to its predetermined size. Proper plant selection cannot be over-emphasized. If you plant the right tree or plant in the right place, you won't have to fight it continually.

Pruning hedges and sheared plants needs some forethought. It is better to leave the plants widest at the base than to prune them into balls. This allows light to reach all actively growing areas and reduces shading out and thus keeps the plants disease-free and healthy. Except in the case of formal hedges and topiaries, plants should be allowed to grow to their natural shape.

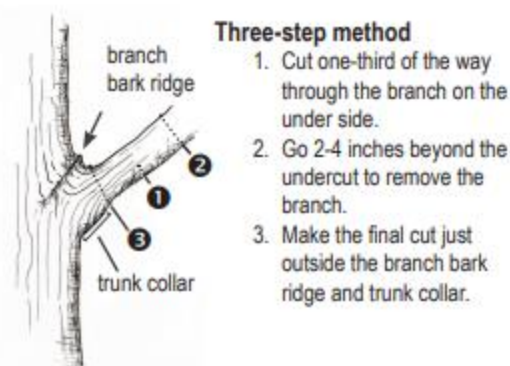
Whenever making heading cuts on shrubbery, which are cuts between a branch tip and the branch point of origin, ensure your cuts are inside the canopy. This conceals the cut, making the plant that has just been pruned look like it hasn't been touched. When pruning narrow leaf evergreens, such as juniper, be sure to make heading cuts to the origin of a lateral branch or thin or remove branches entirely because these plants don't have the ability to produce new side branches when pruned—if you prune narrow-leaf evergreen branches to no foliage, you will be left with no foliage.

People often ask what they should do when shrubs become overgrown. The answer is a technique called severe renewal pruning or rejuvenation pruning. This is a process in which shrubs are cut back to just a few inches or feet from the ground. While the best time to do renewal pruning is late February to early March, renewal pruning can be done at any time during the dormant

season. This technique is, however, not for the faint of heart, nor is it a technique for every plant in the landscape. Generally, this kind of pruning should only be done on deciduous shrubs or broadleaved evergreen shrubs. Boxwoods are the exception. Do not renewal prune them. Narrow-leaved evergreens, such like junipers, cypress, and cedars, should never be renewal pruned.

Tree and shrub pruning is best done to remove excess branches, remove crossing branches that rub together, remove broken branches, remove dead, damaged, and diseased branches, remove double leaders, and remove narrow v-shaped crotches. As a homeowner, you should limit yourself to pruning small branches. Call a professional if pruning has to be done off the ground. For safety, do not attempt to prune large established trees yourself or take down hazardous trees, but contact a qualified tree care professional who has the necessary expertise, experience, and equipment to do it safely. For advice on the safety and health of your trees, call an ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) certified arborist—you can call the Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener Help Desk at 703-771-5150 to find a certified arborist near your location. Never prune near electrical and utility wires—contact your utility company.

When removing large branches that require a pruning saw, three cuts should be made to ensure that bark is not stripped away. Make the first cut on the underside of the branch about a foot out from the trunk, making sure to cut half-way through. The second cut is made outside the first cut



and is made all the way through. The final cut will remove the stub that's left. At this point don't make a flush cut with the surface of the trunk. Remove this stub just outside the swollen area where the branch emerges from the trunk. Pruning this way results in fastest closure and does not injure the tree trunk. Trees should never be topped! Topping is not a correct pruning technique and you should question anyone who tells you to top trees, because topping will result in vigorous, but weak and unsightly upright growth called water sprouts. Topping also opens the tree to internal decay, making it more likely to break in the wind and heavy storms.

3-Step pruning method

Photo courtesy [Tree Owner's Manual USDA](#), p. 19

When selecting pruning tools, you have many options available. The one you pick will be determined by the

size of the cuts to be made. You can use hand pruners to prune small limbs up to one half to three quarters inch in diameter. Use loppers for branches three quarters of an inch to two inches. Use hand pruning saws to prune branches larger than two inches. Chainsaws are not to be used for pruning. They are for cutting firewood or removing trees, not for pruning, unless you are very experienced or a professional. For formal pruning, hand or power shears are a good choice because they can save you pruning time. Do not use hedge shears on trees. It is important to keep your tools sharp. When you use bleach solution to sanitize your pruning tools, oil the blades afterward to prevent rusting. Pruning, correctly done, is necessary to improve growth and form, but it can injure and disfigure trees and shrubs if done incorrectly.

Summary of Basic Pruning Techniques:

- Remove dead, damaged, diseased, or insect-infected branches first, then branches that are rubbing together.
- To shorten a small branch or twig, make the cut about ¼-inch above a bud, facing the outside of the plant, so the new branch will grow in that direction.
- For large branches, make three or four cuts to avoid tearing the bark. Starting about 18 inches from the trunk, make the first cut on the underside of the branch cutting half way through. Make the second cut an inch further out on top, cutting down until the branch breaks free. This eliminates the weight of the branch before making the third cut close to the trunk. The final cut will sever the remaining part of the branch from the main stem at the branch collar. Be careful to remove only the wood beyond the collar. The branch collar should be left intact, but with no stub, if the wound is to seal effectively without decay.
- Research shows that pruning paints are not necessary.
- When pruning hedges, shear the sides so the top is narrower than the base to allow the plant to get enough light.
- Overgrown shrubs such as forsythia and lilac may need renewal pruning: remove a third of the oldest stems or trunks right down to the ground to encourage the growth of new stems.
- You can rejuvenate badly overgrown flowering shrubs by cutting all stems back to the ground in early spring. The shrub will not flower that year but will return to its normal size and shape in one growing season.

Loudoun County Master Gardener Tree Stewards

Creating Winter Interest in Your Garden

Winter can be challenging for those who like to garden. We are stuck inside, reading gardening magazines and scanning catalogs for the seeds, bulbs, and perennials we dream of planting in the spring. However, if your yard includes plants and trees with visual interest, winter can be a great time to observe and enjoy your garden. Did you know that gazing out your window has proven health benefits? Research has shown that views of nature, as well as walks in your garden, can be an antidote to stress and can lower blood pressure¹. Those views can give a “feeling of being away.” So how do you create a mini vacation in your backyard this time of year?

You can take several different approaches to achieve winter interest. The use of evergreens is a simple way to make your winter garden attractive. While there are many tried and true evergreen shrubs commonly found in local gardens—like boxwood and yews—opt for something unique. The Gold Mop Threadbranch Cypress (*Chamaecyparis pisifera filifera* ‘Golden Mop’) brightens up any space with its yellow and lime green evergreen branches, and, as an added bonus, it is deer resistant. This slow-growing shrub stands out when planted in front of darker color junipers and pines, creating interesting contrast.



Gold Mop

A distinctive evergreen for your yard is the Goshiki False Holly (*Osmanthus heterophyllus* ‘Goshiki’). Its leaves are the shape of traditional holly but are variegated (green leaves edged with white), and the new growth in the spring is a lovely orangey-pink. Originally purchased for a container, it required transplanting to my backyard. Placed in front of Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) it provides interesting contrast almost year-round.



Goshiki False Holly



Ilex verticillata

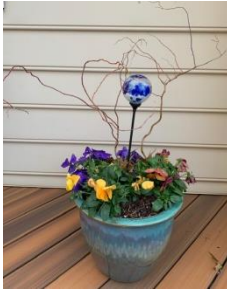
Visual interest in the winter can also be created by the use of shrubs with bright berries. Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), a deciduous holly, is easy to grow and tolerates a wide range of soils and lighting conditions. The berries provide a source of food for birds during the winter, but before the birds feast, it can brighten up your landscape with its vivid red berries. Please note that Winterberries are dioecious (separate male and female plants); therefore, make sure to plant both a male and a female to ensure berries next winter.

Another approach to create an appealing winter landscape is the use of deciduous trees or shrubs that have interesting branch patterns or shapes. The Curly Willow tree (*Salix matsudana* ‘Tortuosa’) is a great addition to the garden with its twisting branches that whirl about in the wind. This fast-growing ornamental tree reaches a height of 25 to 35 feet. With its spreading roots, the tree needs to be placed away from sidewalks. The reddish-hued thin stems can be used in floral designs and containers to add color and novelty.



Curly Willow.

¹ Kaplan, S. 1995. “The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 15 (3): 169-182.



What about those perennials that you enjoyed last summer? Don't cut them back! The stems and seed pods create interesting shapes when covered with snow and serve as a sanctuary for pollinators and a source of food for birds. As you peruse the garden catalogs this winter and plan for next year's garden, keep in mind those plants that offer winter interest and a way to escape from the winter blues!

Jan Lane, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener, HTR



SAVE THE DATE

Loudoun County Extension
Master Gardeners

11th Annual Gardening Symposium

March 21, 2020
9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Leesburg Community Church
835 Lee Avenue SW
Leesburg, VA 20175

Registration opens February 1, 2020

loudouncountymastergardeners.org

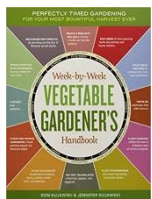


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Winter Garden Reading

As winter approaches and activity in the garden slows, I slow down and take time to go back to some of my favored garden books for new ideas. A few of these are reviewed below.



One of my favorites is *Week-by-Week Vegetable Gardener's Handbook* by Ron and Jennifer Kujawski. This father-daughter team has put together not just a great how-to book, but a customizable to-do list and garden journal. The first few pages include some general gardening tips. The fun and planning begin when you determine your frost date and enter that on the appropriate page located about a third of the way into the book. From there, you count back and fill in the pages at the beginning of the book and count forward to fill in sections in the remainder of the book. Each section, such as "late winter," "early spring," "mid spring," etc., includes a multiweek overview and guidance for major tasks that include seed starting, planting, maintenance, and/or harvesting as appropriate for the season. The seasonal overview also includes a three-year journal page. This is followed by weekly pages that include tasks for specific crops. Scattered throughout the book are more garden tips and comments by the authors.

Another favorite is *The Wildlife-Friendly Vegetable Gardener* by Tammi Hartung, illustrated by Holly Ward Bimba. The book offers compelling reasons and ways to invite beneficial wildlife to your garden. The author admits that nothing short of a 7-foot-tall fence with wire extending 12 to 18 inches underground will successfully keep out many of our uninvited guests, but the book offers practical advice for deterring or learning to coexist with our local wildlife. The book includes charming illustrations such as a page to help the gardener distinguish among various types of bees, another to identify different wasps and hornets, and one to identify a variety of beneficial garden creatures. An appendix provides a quick reference chart for remedies for various garden critters.



Two of my go-to books for the flower garden are *The Ever-Blooming Flower Garden* by Lee Schneller and *Design Your Garden Toolkit* by Michelle Gervais. The subtitle of the first book is "A Blueprint for Continuous Color," so the focus is on color and balance in the perennial garden. The first part of the book explores various design elements including color, bloom time, plant height, and plant habit. Charts help guide in the selection of plants by grouping them by height and using a bar graph to show bloom time and color. The second half of the book goes alphabetically through approximately 200 plants with specific information and a bar graph that corresponds to the earlier charts. The last few pages of the book include additional tips. There is a chart for calculating the number of plants needed based on garden size and desired ratio of short, medium, and tall plants. Also included are lists of plants good for a variety of purposes and conditions, those to avoid, and an index of common names.

The book portion of *Design Your Garden Toolkit* gives advice on garden planning and plant selection based on harmony and contrast, color, texture, and plant shape. The book includes illustrations and descriptions of 128 plants. The bonus part is the toolkit, which includes reusable cling stickers for 150 plants and garden elements and a design board with both a graph and a garden scene so the gardener can visualize how plants will look.



Diane Bayless, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener

Hard Working Houseplants

In order to save energy and reduce our carbon footprint, we have insulated our homes very well, caulked all the cracks, and sealed them up tight. In solving the drafty house problem, we have created another problem—toxic fumes trapped inside our houses.

In the late 1980s, NASA researchers studied the ability of houseplants to purify the air and remove toxic agents such as benzene (in glue, paint, and auto fumes); formaldehyde (in particleboard, paper, carpets, cigarette smoke, and natural gas); and trichloroethylene (in paint stripper and spot remover). The study contained a list of air-filtering plants, and subsequent studies have shown similar benefits of houseplants.

There are many lists of air-purifying plants. The champion air purifier does not fall in the common and easy indoor plant category. It's an outdoor plant—the common garden mum. It would take some rotation and work to maintain one indoors, but it may be worth the effort, depending on the indoor pollution problem.

The following is a list of air-purifying plants that are easy to grow common house plants. Choose several different types and place one in every room. **Some of these plants may not be safe for pets.** I have had almost all of these plants at one time or another and I have always had house cats and have never had a problem, but be forewarned!

Aloe plant

An aloe vera plant is in greater danger of being overwatered than underwatered. Aloes like a soil that drains well. A cactus mix or a sandy soil is good for larger pots. Bright, indirect light is best. Watch for scale.



Dracaena 'Janet Craig' (*Dracaena deremensis*)

Dracaenas are easy to grow. This large group of houseplants comes in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Choose from the tall corn plant, which has interesting markings, or the rainbow plant, which comes in bright purple. Keep the soil damp but not soggy because too much water is a kiss of death for this plant. Dracaenas eliminate formaldehyde, xylene, toluene, benzene, and trichloroethylene.

Dracaena. Photo by
Barbara H Smith
Clemson U. Extension

Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*)

These are one of the top three plants for removing common household toxins, even ammonia. Keep soil slightly moist. Peace lilies thrive in most lighting conditions, but too little light can prevent flowers from blooming. The peace lily eliminates formaldehyde, benzene, trichloroethylene, xylene, ammonia, and more.



Peace Lily. Photo
UF House Plants



Bamboo Palm. [Photo](#)
[ASPCA](#)

Bamboo palm (*Chamaedorea seifrizii*)

It likes bright, but not direct sunlight. Keep the soil moist. Place bamboo palms where air circulates freely, and mist occasionally to prevent spider mites. Bamboo palms also transpire a healthy dose of moisture into the air, making it a welcome addition in dry winter months. Bamboo palm eliminates formaldehyde, benzene, carbon monoxide, xylene, chloroform. It is nontoxic to cats and dogs.

Rubber plants (*Ficus elastic*)

These plants love bright, filtered light. Water moderately to keep the soil moist, especially in the winter. Prune the leaves and wipe them down to keep them looking pretty. They eliminate carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, trichloroethylene, and more.

Golden Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*)



Golden Pothos. [Photo](#)
[NC State Plant Data Base](#)

Golden Pothos flourishes in a variety of conditions and is virtually indestructible. It can grow up to 8 feet long. It's also considered one of the most effective indoor air purifiers for removing common toxins. Water when the soil is dry. You can trim the tendrils when the plant gets too big. It eliminates formaldehyde, xylene, toluene, benzene, carbon monoxide, and more. This plant is moderately poisonous.

Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema*)

Water moderately and allow compost to almost dry out before watering. Chinese evergreens like high humidity, a little regular misting, and getting repotted every few years. This plant eliminates benzene, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, trichloroethylene, and more.



Chinese Evergreen. [UF](#)
[Gardening Solutions](#)

Spider plants (*Chlorophytum comosum*)

Spider plants grow quickly and look great in hanging baskets, especially in your work space. Water your spider plants two to three times a week. A spider plant eliminates formaldehyde and xylene.

Ficus tree (*Ficus benjamina*)



Ficus tree. [Photo](#)
[Clemson Ext.](#)

This popular indoor plant, sometimes called a weeping fig, does best with plenty of bright indirect natural light. Water it frequently, but to avoid root rot, allow the soil to dry before adding more water. It prefers normal house temperatures and humidity above 50%. A ficus tree eliminates formaldehyde, xylene, and toluene.

Snake plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata*)

These plants are very low maintenance. They can endure low amounts of light for long durations, but they grow best with plenty of bright light. Don't overwater because it is likely to rot if the soil is too moist for too long. A snake plant eliminates formaldehyde, nitrogen oxide, benzene, xylene, and trichloroethylene.

Four Benefits of Indoor Plants

In addition to cleaning the air, there are other benefits of house plants:

Higher Oxygen Levels: During photosynthesis, plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Plants add oxygen to indoor air during the day. At night, most absorb some oxygen and release carbon dioxide. A few types of houseplants release oxygen at night—mainly succulents, moth orchid, dendrobium orchid, snake plant, and bromeliads—making them ideal companions for the bedroom.

Lower Mold and Bacteria Counts: A home filled with lots of houseplants has 50 to 60 percent fewer mold spores and bacteria. Houseplants emit substances called phytochemicals that suppress these microbes in indoor environments.

Improved Mood: Studies from the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia, found that indoor plants reduce anger by 44 percent, anxiety by 37 percent, fatigue by 38 percent, and depression by 58 percent. Amazingly, just one plant can make a difference.

Natural Humidifier: Plants release moisture through their leaves. Use plants to keep indoor air within the ideal humidity range. Palms and ferns, in particular, have high transpiration rates. Most indoor plants prefer higher humidity and may need their leaves misted with water for optimum health.

Treat yourself to several of these healthful plants.

Carol Ivory, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener



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