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Sharing of the Greens

— by Gertrude Greengloves, Christmas Greenery Specialist

The celebration and symbols of the Christmas holiday are of complex and multiple origins. Many ancient peoples observed the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, honoring their gods to ensure that the days would again grow longer and winter would pass to spring. Romans had the Saturnalia festival to honor Saturn, the god of time. It was held in December, and placing Christmas at this time of year grew out of this rambunctious Roman holiday. Plants used for modern holiday decoration played a part in ancient religious celebrations. Evergreens were of particular interest to the ancient Europeans, as they symbolized life in the midst of winter death.

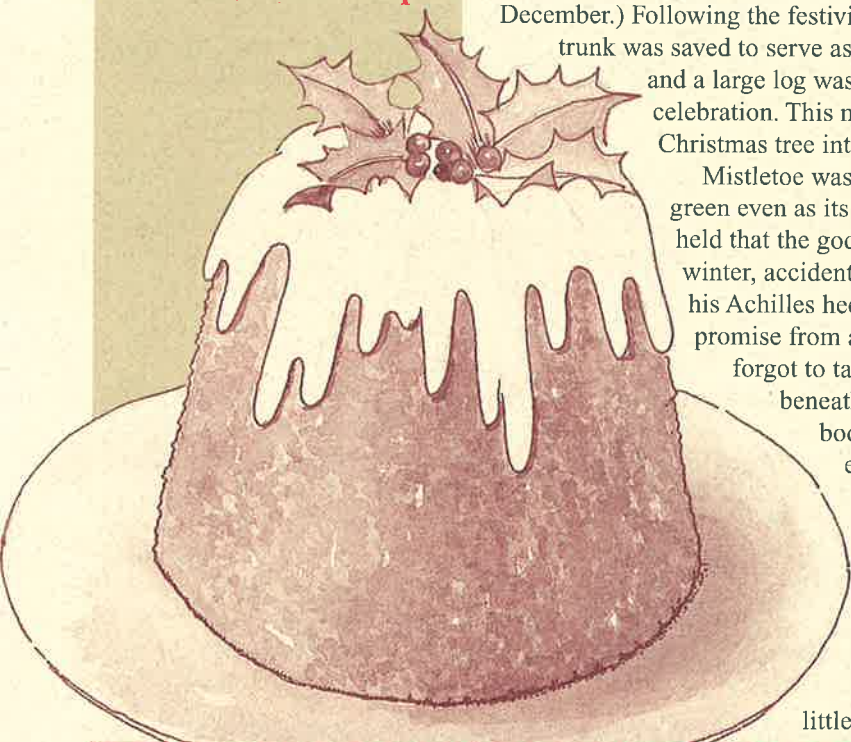
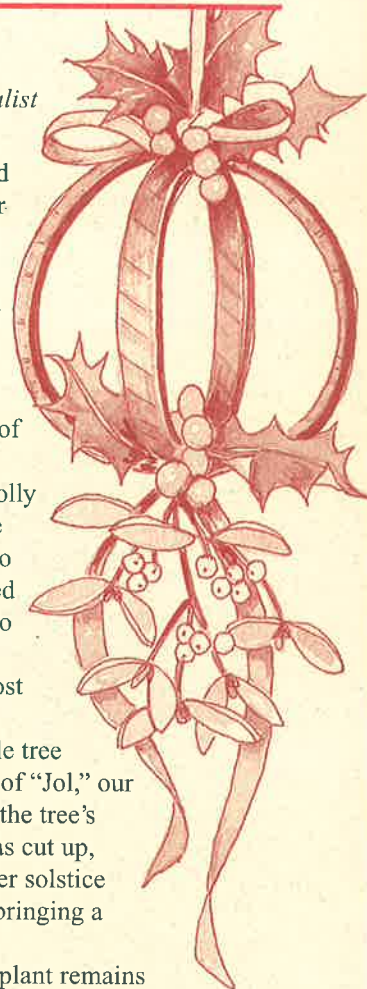
The Romans considered holly to be a plant sacred to Saturn, and holly wreaths were given as gifts at the Saturnalia. Holly was adopted by the Christians, who not only used its prickly green leaves and red berries to symbolize the Crown of Thorns, but also believed it was the wood used to build the Cross. A charming tradition in England is for beekeepers to put a sprig of holly on their beehives. It is said that in the manger in Bethlehem, bees "hummed in honor of the Christ Child." You can almost hear them humming as an undercurrent to "Pa-Rum-Pum-Pum-Pum."

A custom of various Germanic tribes was to bring an evergreen Yule tree into the home to celebrate the solstice. ("Yule" comes from the month of "Jol," our December.) Following the festivities, the branches were removed, and the tree's trunk was saved to serve as a May Pole. Afterwards, the trunk was cut up, and a large log was kept to light the first fire of the winter solstice celebration. This may have evolved into the practice of bringing a Christmas tree into the home.

Mistletoe was particularly revered, as this parasitic plant remains green even as its host tree loses its leaves for the winter. A Scandinavian tale held that the god of the sun, Baldur, was slain when Hoder, the blind god of winter, accidentally shot him with an arrow of mistletoe wood. (Mistletoe was his Achilles heel, as it were. His mother Frigga, the Valkyrie, had extracted a promise from all of the elements, plants and animals to not harm her son. She forgot to talk to mistletoe.) Freya, goddess of love, placed Baldur's body beneath an oak tree upon which mistletoe grew. She wept over the body, and her tears became the white berries of mistletoe. Baldur eventually returned to life, and a joyful Freya kissed everyone that passed under the tree upon which the mistletoe grew.

To enjoy cut greens for the holidays, remember that they will hold up best if placed in water and kept cool. A spray with an anti-transpirant, such as Wilt-Pruf®, will help to slow the rate of drying, and add a shiny luster to leaves or needles.

Remember to keep holly and mistletoe out of the reach of little folk as the poisonous berries may be attractive to children. ♡



Holiday Open House

Thursday, November 19

6:30pm - 9pm, at Beltsville

Please join us for our annual lighting of the holiday lights. Behnke Nurseries is transformed into a magical holiday wonderland with fresh greenery, twinkling lights, and the newest and most unique holiday decorations. Enjoy light refreshments, holiday music, ideas for holiday decorating, an opportunity to win door prizes, and a special savings coupon good only for that evening.

Demonstrations:

- **Holiday Floral Arrangements**
(6:45pm) Behnke Floral designers create fresh floral holiday arrangements.
- **Unusual Holiday Wreaths**
(7:30pm) Randy Best uses natural materials in his unique wreaths.
- **Holiday Container Gardens**
(8:00pm) Eric Morrison demonstrates plant selection and planting of his magnificent container gardens.

The Light at the Edge of the World

A lecture/slide show with Wade Davis
Saturday, November 21, 1pm
at Beltsville

Behnke Nurseries is proud to announce a slide and lecture presentation by noted ethnobotanist and author, Wade Davis. Wade, who has been called "a rare combination of scientist, scholar, poet, and passionate defender of all of life's diversity," will recount some of his most memorable journeys to the far corners of the world. The lecture is free, but please call 301-937-1100 to reserve your seat.

Blown Glass Ornament Demonstration

Friday and Saturday
November 27 & 28
at Beltsville

Demonstration hours are 11am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm each day. Whitehurst's own German master crafters, Herr and Frau Müller, will demonstrate the centuries-old craft of blowing glass ornaments. This is your opportunity not only to see how these fabulous glass ornaments are made, but to have a special ornament made just for you. The pieces created on this visit will be unique collector's items, as none will be silvered on the inside. The ornaments will sell for \$35 - \$45 each, and a portion from each sale will go to Children's Hospital. Personalized ornaments will be created upon request. The Müllers will blow only about 50 ornaments per day — we recommend that you reserve yours early at the Beltsville Christmas Shop. Ornaments are on display at Behnke Nurseries, Beltsville. Take advantage of this rare opportunity to purchase collectible Whitehurst glass ornaments.



Herbal Soap Making

Saturday, November 14,
10am and 1pm at Beltsville

Join Leslie Plant as she teaches you to create marvelous soaps, guiding you through the process with the materials she supplies. Tuition of \$25 includes the use of everything you'll need.

Leslie also will have a generous supply of her unique handmade soaps available for purchase.

Poinsettias on Parade 1998

Sunday, November 29,
Noon to 4pm at Largo

Holiday demonstrations, light refreshments, door prizes and a special savings coupon enhance this once-a-year opportunity to see our fabulous poinsettia greenhouses in Largo. You'll see oceans of Behnke Signature poinsettias at their peak! Bring a camera and take advantage of this perfect backdrop for your holiday photos!

Demonstrations:

- **Hand-Tied Bows**
(1:00pm) Learn a quick and easy way to make beautiful holiday bows for packages and decorating.
- **Festive Holiday Wreaths**
(2:00pm) Our floral designers will show you how to create your own beautiful wreaths for the holidays.

Holiday Shopping Hours

Thanksgiving Day, November 26: Closed
November 27 through December 23: Open Monday through Saturday,
8am to 8pm, Sundays 8am to 6pm
Christmas Eve, December 24: Open 8am to 5pm
Christmas Day, December 25: Closed
December 26 through February 13: Open 8am to 6pm
New Year's Eve, December 31: Open 8am to 5pm
New Year's Day, January 1, 1999: Closed

Holiday Decorations Workshops

Saturday, December 12, 10am and 1pm
at Beltsville and Largo

Join our staff as they show you how to make a festive holiday centerpiece using fresh greenery, berries and ornaments. Tuition of \$25 includes the use of everything you'll need to make your own centerpiece for the holidays.

Please call to register:

301-249-2492 in Largo
301-937-1100 in Beltsville

The Well-Tended Perennial Garden

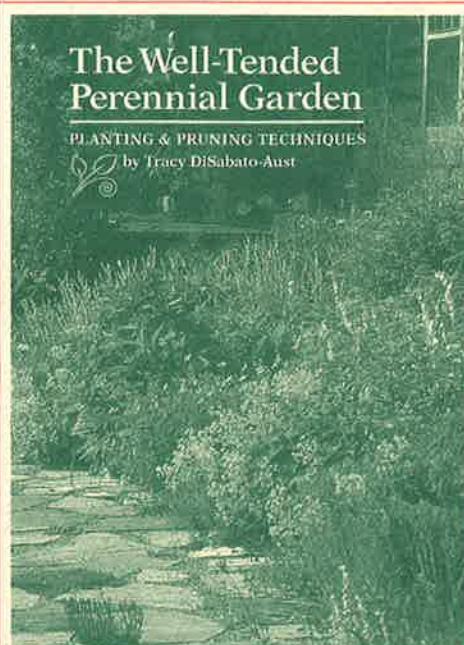
A book Review by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Over the last ten years there has been an explosion of books about perennial gardening. Every niche seems to have been exploited—I am waiting to see *Perennial Subterranea—the Glory of Perennial Crowns in Winter*, which I am sure someone, somewhere, is writing.

I heard about this book at a meeting of the Perennial Plant Association, from Lynn Cohen, former perennial manager at Behnke's, who said: "You should place a copy of this book in the hands of every person who asks a question about perennials. This is the best book about perennial care that I have ever seen!"

The author, Tracy DiSabato-Aust, is a horticulturist and landscaper/designer from Ohio. The book draws upon her years of experience to explain how to get the most from a perennial garden through proper planting, and selective cutting back and pruning. Tracy focuses on pruning perennials to prevent the need to stake tall plants, to extend or change the blooming period, to extend the life of biennials (which normally die after flowering), and to shape plants for a more pleasing appearance.

The introductory section covers in detail the techniques and tools Tracy uses, with excellent information on soil improvement, bed preparation, and planting. The main body of the book is an



The Well-Tended Perennial Garden
Planting and Pruning Techniques
Tracy DiSabato-Aust
Timber Press; 1998
\$29.99; hardcover

alphabetical encyclopedia of specific advice for perennial species. There are 36 lists in the back that summarize the information; e.g., "Perennials To Cut Back After Flowering for Aesthetics in the Summer." There are also 131 excellent color plates that illustrate examples in the text: a perennial garden at planting and

three months later; pruning back *Dianthus*; the height of a pinched plant vs. an unpinched plant at time of bloom.

This is a "meat and potatoes" book, which should be useful for all levels of gardeners. The style is chatty, and directed toward professional landscapers as well as gardeners. Bear in mind that Tracy is a horticulturist writing a "how-to" book, not a writer who likes to garden so the advice is solid, and avoids the flowery style of so many garden writers.

Many of my personal peeves are covered correctly (Does gypsum break up clay soils: no; does adding sand to clay soils improve drainage: no; what is the best thing to improve a soil: organic matter, not topsoil)—factually, the book is great. My only complaint is that the indexing is weak. For example, there is a plant-name index, but no index to the introductory material. This will make the book somewhat difficult to use without a thorough reading of the preliminary chapters. Nonetheless, I think **The Well-Tended Perennial Garden** would be a very useful addition to any perennial gardener's library. ☺

Tracy DiSabato-Aust will present a seminar on "The Well-Tended Perennial Garden" on Saturday, March 27, 1999, during our Spring Seminar Series. Look for a schedule in the next GardeNews.

The Perennial Garden in Winter

— by Melodie Likel, Perennial Specialist and Horticultural Researcher

As the weather turns cool and the promise of winter is in the air, the perennial garden needs a final tidying and tucking up for the cold months ahead.

Once plants have been killed to the ground by frost, all that remains to do is cut each one back leaving only an inch or two of stem above the soil, so that the plant will be easy to locate in spring.

Some plants may have basal leaves, which can be left to overwinter in the garden. These often remain green if temperatures are not too severe. Clear up dead stems and debris — so that you leave no winter hiding places for pests or diseases.

Grasses, Russian sage, and sedum can be left standing for winter interest. The dried seed heads of coneflowers and

black-eyed-susans make tasty snacks for sunshine yellow goldfinches that flit among the stems and put on amazing balancing acts.

Once the ground is frozen, the garden can be treated to a blanket of mulch. Then put away the garden paraphernalia and revel in the most satisfying of perennial gardener's delights—the anticipation of spring. ☺

Houseplants Welcome Yo

The holidays are approaching, your spare time is consumed with shopping for gifts, and guests are expected this weekend. Sound familiar? Living plant arrangements create a welcoming atmosphere in any home, but choosing the right plants for the right places can be stressful for you and your plants. Let me show you some quick and simple solutions for this busy, but wonderful time of year.

Certain seasonal houseplants coincide with Christmas. Poinsettias certainly are the most familiar to us, combining in one plant both red and green, the two traditional colors of Christmas. Behnke's also offers many new varieties of our Signature Poinsettias available in shades of pink and creamy white, even some with speckles or streaks. Cyclamen, azaleas, Christmas cacti, and Rieger begonias are also some of my favorites. Cyclamen and azaleas, among the most popular houseplants in autumn and winter, have a potential life-span far longer than is often realized. While these plants can be stressed by too much or too little water and excessive heat, if properly treated they can flower year after year, increasing in number of flowers.

You can easily increase the impact of a seasonal display by massing several identical plants together, either in one large container or several individual ones. This is particularly true if you have a large room, where a single display of four or five Christmas cacti or Rieger begonias, grouped together in a large clay bowl or rustic-looking basket can appear quite spectacular. In addition, houseplants will benefit from being massed together, rather than being positioned randomly around the house. Plants "like" growing together because they give off water

vapor which makes the surrounding air more humid.

Even more fun and adventurous is creating your own arrangement using a variety of winter-flowering plants or attractive foliage plants. When selecting your container keep in mind that not only must it match the scale of the plants, but it must harmonize with the flowers. Many people select white containers, thinking they are a safe choice for displaying indoor plants. Unless your scheme incorporates a lot of white flowers or variegated foliage, white pots can look very lonely when set against healthy looking plants. A safer choice is green or terra-cotta, which tends to look good with most color schemes and never dominates.

Whether you have chosen a wicker basket, ceramic bowl, or simply a large terra-cotta or plastic saucer, it is time to carry it through our greenhouses and experiment. Focus your attention on our large selection of plants in 3- and 4-inch pots, keeping in mind that you won't have to re-pot or transplant your creation. In this way you can choose to group together plants with different watering needs so long as they require similar amounts of light and temperature. It will also make replacement of plants that have finished blooming much easier. Don't forget to pick up a small plastic saucer for each plant. They make putting together an arrangement even quicker and easier.



ur Holiday House Guests



Behnke's has flowering plants for every season of the year. I prefer cool, subtle color harmonies — blues, pinks, mauves, and whites. They have a very calming effect and are easier to live with than the vibrant colors of reds, yellow, and oranges — which tend to dominate or overpower. Try the latter colors in January when light levels are low and a more rigorous treatment is needed to brighten an otherwise dreary room. If you are creating an all-foliage display instead of a blooming arrangement, it is important to pick plants with different leaf shapes, colors, and forms.

If you're running short on time, you can always select from our large assortment of ready-made dish gardens and plant combinations. Many of them will feature our specialty — African violets.

For something different, any sturdy, woody-stemmed houseplant can be a potential Christmas tree. By far the most popular indoor Christmas tree is the Norfolk Island pine. I eagerly await our new shipment of these beautiful and delicate light green evergreens in mid-November. These, along with our "early-blooming" poinsettia varieties, officially begins our holiday plant season. Norfolk Island pines prefer a cool location in your home for the winter and bright indirect light during their winter rest period. Our pines are sun-grown to provide you with the best possible shape and are not spray-painted green.

Weeping figs are especially beautiful with Christmas tree lights

strung through their branches. I recommend that you try our "new" discovery *Ficus benjamina* 'Monique'. It has deep green, glossy foliage which resists the leaf drop which often plagues the older varieties of weeping figs. Our growers call this "the ficus of the future."

I have even seen dragon palms, corn plants, and rubber trees become attractive Christmas features using various lengths of fine black string to hang a variety of Christmas ornaments.

For children in the house, decorate your living Christmas tree with red and white striped candy canes, foil-covered Santas, or bags of foil-covered chocolate coins. Our Christmas Shop can provide you with Christmas treasures of the non-edible sort — exquisite handmade glass ornaments in imaginative shapes from Europe, American-made blown glass ornaments, miniature gardening ornaments, enamelled ornaments in the cloisonne style, metallic stars, and much more. For an elegant yet simple presentation, you could decorate your indoor tree with red, green, gold, silver, or white ribbon bows.

By the way, don't forget to "festivize" the dull green foliage plants already in your home. A quick and easy way to provide seasonal interest is to add branches of contorted willow or walking stick, or holly sprigs in berry, eucalyptus sprigs, or even berried twigs of pyracantha, winterberry, or cotoneaster, just to name a few.

Come to Behnke's and let us help you welcome your house guests! ❧

— by Mike Bader, Buyer/Manager,
Houseplant Department

The Language of



— by Ellen Schaffer, Perennial Specialist, Largo

Say it with flowers.” This oft-repeated phrase of modern invention was coined by the telecommunications industry as a marketing tool. But the concept has a long and colorful history dating back thousands of years. Since the beginning of human tradition, flowers have been used in rituals and ceremonies.

The “Language of Flowers” evolved from both eastern and western traditions. Centuries ago the Turks assigned meanings to a variety of objects (including flowers) in order to send secret messages. The repertoire included a wide range of symbolic sentiments and codes so that a “letter” could be constructed, simple or complex, to relay information or express feelings. Flower symbolism in the west also dates back to antiquity. Some meanings were assigned arbitrarily and others simply derived from the physical attributes of a plant. The bulk of references were drawn from the customs and traditions of western culture. Ancient legends, Greek and Roman mythology, religion, medical practices, heraldry, poetry, and literature are among the many sources that form the foundation of floral language. The Bible, the works of Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson, and the healing arts, for example, are replete with illustrations.

In late 18th and early 19th century Europe, a growing interest in the field of botany and the customs of the east, including the Turkish secret message system, led to the development of a western system based solely on flowers and the publication of flower vocabulary books. Their popularity spread across Europe and to the United States, until the language of flowers reached its

height in the Victorian period when it became custom, particularly between lovers, to exchange small bouquets or nosegays to discreetly express those emotions that could not be spoken. Floral dictionaries abounded, each one more expansive than the last, to include all forms of plant life from mushrooms to magnolias as well as their individual parts or products (blossoms, fruits, leaves, spices). Even colors were assigned separate status. Each color of rose or chrysanthemum, for example, had separate meanings. And sending the wrong shade could spell big trouble for a relationship. It became essential, therefore, not only to become adept at recognizing flowers, but also to know their botanical and common names. This expertise coupled with a good dictionary enabled one to assemble a meaningful bouquet or to decipher the silent secret-coded message of a well-wisher or admirer.

The Victorian tradition has been enjoying a mild resurgence in recent years, including the design of small bouquets. So why not step back into the past and let flowers expand your communication base. Think of how special it would be to “say it with flowers” and really mean it, or to know that a gift of flowers to you carried a special sentiment. Send a yellow rose to express friendship or a red one to say “I love you,” parsley to thank someone, lavender for happiness, feverfew to wish good health. Or, design a small bouquet to express a complex of sentiments. When good friends move, you might want to say farewell and good luck, tell them that your thoughts are with them and ask to be remembered. A bouquet of spruce, clover, pansies and forget-me-nots or calendulas will say it for you elegantly.

The Behnke Florist Shops at Beltsville and Potomac can design a bouquet to beautifully express your sentiments. Call 301-937-4032 in Beltsville or 301-983-4400 in Potomac and put petal power to work for you. ~

Suggested reading: Tussie-Mussies, The Victorian Art of Expressing Yourself in the Language of Flowers by Geraldine Adamich Laufer, published in 1993 by Workman Publishing, NY.



Visit Behnke Nurseries on the World Wide Web: <http://www.behnke.com>

An Open Letter to Santa Claus

— by Randy Best, Perennial Specialist

Dear Santa,

Please go back and check your records. I should think by now you'd have a clear idea of the type of gifts I'd really like to find under my tree. Ever since I learned to garden at my Granddad's knee, back in Texas, I have longed for plants, pots, tools and unique gardening gadgets and books to add to my collection. My passion is gardening. I am at a loss to understand why I find so many turtleneck sweaters and plaid winter scarves under the tree each year....after year...after year...

You know, Santa, if you were truly watching you couldn't have missed the hints I've constantly been dropping. Remember when I ran over the hose with the lawn mower a few years back? I should think a hose reel would have been in order. But instead? A warm winter scarf....in plaid. And how about when I fell off the ladder trying to water my window boxes because I didn't have an extension wand on the end of my hose? Or the time I suffered sunburn because my hat blew away in a thunderstorm? How could you have missed that painful hint? Did I get a sunhat? No, another turtleneck sweater, extra large.

I hope you're getting the point. Which reminds me, my Felco® pruners (which I purchased myself years ago) are as sharp as ever — but it would sure be swell to have an extra pair, perhaps a different model. And some rugged gardening gloves would protect my hands from blisters and accidental cuts. I have enough plaid scarves to carpet the living room by now.



But when it comes to gardening tools, I could *never* have enough!

Santa, I know you're very busy, and I know gardening is not one of your areas of expertise, what with you living at the North Pole and all. So, as a service to you, and all the passionate gardeners on your list, I'm sending you a Gardener's Wish List. Think of it as a guideline — I wouldn't want to cramp your style. If your elves rebel at working holiday overtime, you can always make a pit stop at Behnke Nurseries — they're even open on Christmas Eve!

Well Santa, I guess I'll sign off now. I'm pretty busy this time of year myself. There's always so much to do in the garden: laying down mulch, pruning, planting a new perennial bed, watering, and protecting tender plants. I find that an extra large turtleneck stretched between two stakes makes a fine wind screen for my Japanese red maple.

Always your friend
in gardening,

Randy

Gardener's Wish List

Copper Plant Tags
Metal Labeling Stakes
Squirrel-Proof Bird Feeder
Dramm Professional Watering Tool Set
Corona Lifetime Warranty Trowel
Spraymaster House and Garden Spray Bottles
Fast Gro Electric Heating Propagation Mat
Wren house (wrens like slugs!)
Teak Garden Bench for
Relaxing in the Garden
Any Gardening Book at all!
Paperwhite Narcissus for Forcing
Decorative Terra Cotta or Ceramic Pots
Felco® Pruners
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Settle Them In for a Warm Winter's Nap

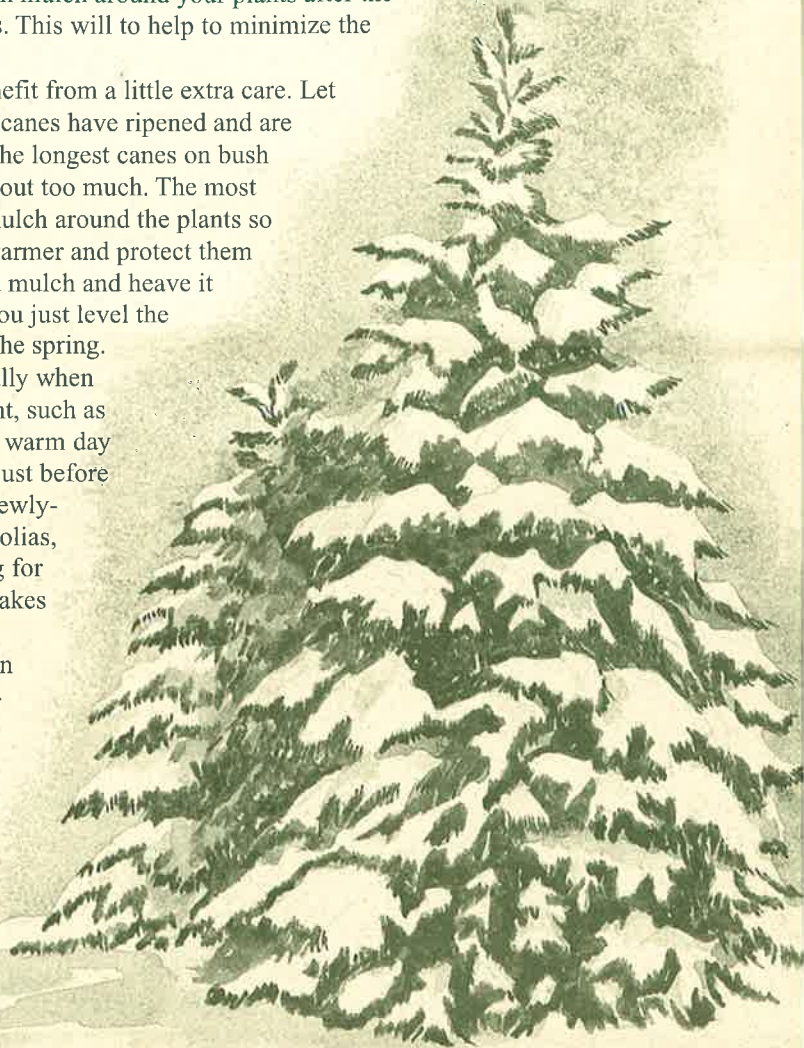
— by Helmut Jaehnigen, Woody Plants Specialist

As the cold season approaches there are several things to do for your trees and shrubs to ease their stress during the coldest months of winter. In general it is a good idea to apply fresh mulch around your plants after the ground has frozen and you have raked up the fallen leaves. This will help to minimize the effects of freezing and thawing.

Roses, my favorite plant, do well in our area, but they benefit from a little extra care. Let them experience some really cold weather first to be sure that their canes have ripened and are ready for winter. Then, just before Christmas you may want to cut the longest canes on bush roses to about 2 feet so that the winter winds will not whip them about too much. The most important step in winter care is just piling up some extra soil and mulch around the plants so that the natural moisture in the soil will keep the roses somewhat warmer and protect them from the drying winter winds. Simply take the surrounding soil and mulch and heave it up to about 8-12 inches high around the plant. Come early spring you just level the soil and mulch with your garden rake and your roses are ready for the spring.

Broadleaf evergreens are somewhat tender for this area, especially when planted in fall. I suggest that you spray them with an anti-transpirant, such as Wiltpruf®, to help protect their tender leaves. Apply the spray on a warm day when the temperature is between 40° and 70°. I usually wait until just before Christmas because the protection lasts only about 8 weeks. Other newly-planted trees and shrubs, such as fig trees, crape myrtles, and magnolias, could benefit from a little extra care. I recommend burlap screening for these plants for the first two years or so. Simply anchor three tall stakes around the plant, and wrap burlap around them, stapling the burlap securely to the stakes. I usually fill the screen loosely with the fallen leaves from my shade trees. The leaves provide ideal protection because the rain and snow will filter through the leaves but cold wind cannot penetrate.

My favorite fruit tree, the fig, gets this little extra protection in the winter. In spring I am rewarded with an early crop of figs, which is produced on the older wood which has survived the winter. In addition, I will get another crop of fresh figs in late fall. The sweetness of a fresh-picked fig, like that of a homegrown tomato, cannot be bought in any store and, since the fig tree is one fruit tree that requires no spraying, the figs can be eaten fresh off the tree. ~



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