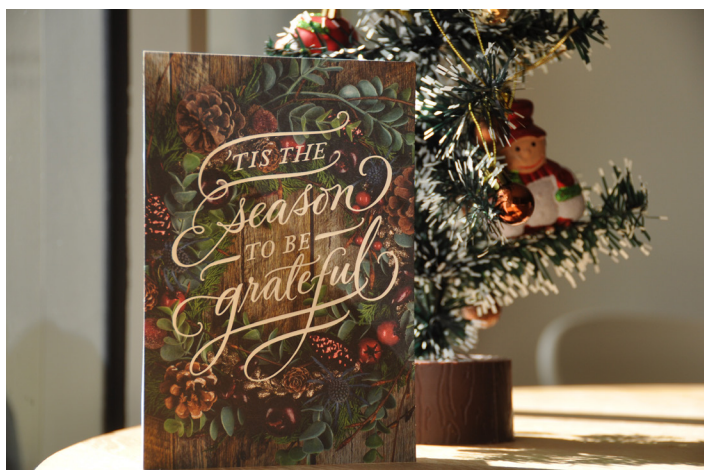


## Dunesland Latest Dirt



## PRESIDENTS' POINTS



It's time to put your garden to bed....yes, tuck your perennials under a blanket of mulch or leaves, and put your tools away. Sit back for a moment and enjoy the peace of the upcoming holiday season.

Instead of sadness caused by pandemic restrictions, savor the time to reflect on the real meaning of the season. Instead of the usual hectic hubbub of the holidays, immerse yourself in quietness. Instead of frantically trying to "do it all", take a few minutes to be kind to yourself. Maybe enjoy a cup of tea and some beautiful Christmas music.

Most of all, remember that it's not what we have missed, but that we can look forward to a better new year when once again we can gather, greet our friends in person, and join in the activities that make us happy.

Merry Christmas, my friends, and a happy, healthy New Year.



*Sandi Shea*

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Joyce Frederick	6	Sonia Bedrosian	21
Carole Bufton	8	Mary Fredrickson	21
Elaine Poole	9	Barbara Redman	26
Rebecca Bozarth	13	Linette Parrish	28
Diane Sheehan	17	Barbara Farrell	29
Kathy Knutell	19	Kim Hemphill	30



## ISSUE 4

December 2020

## RE-BLOOMING

*"Hope is the thing with feathers—  
That perches in the soul—  
And sings the tune without the words—  
And never stops—at all—"*

Emily Dickinson

According to both Merriam-Webster and Dictionary.com, the word of the year is Pandemic. No



surprise as COVID-19 has upended us globally, nationally, locally (our club! our club!) and personally. We are changed. We are weary. But we are also newly strengthened as we look for ways to survive and thrive. Like the dandelion muscling its way through broken pavement, we reach for the sun.

The author and poet Alice O. Howell wrote: *"Hope is a positive point of view tinged with joy that doesn't demand a certain outcome but trusts in the goodness of life."*

As 2020 draws to a close, it seems a fitting way to face our future.

Wishing you all peace, joy and a New Year filled with hope.

*Jan LaBelle*

You can also find news on our Facebook page:

[www.facebook.com/illinoisduneslandgardenclub](https://www.facebook.com/illinoisduneslandgardenclub)



# PRESIDENTS' POINTS

*Well, this will certainly be a different Christmas this year, but I think we can still have a very enjoyable holiday. If you have family that you want to see but are staying isolated, check out the Zoom, Skype or Messenger applications to see and talk to them. We were able to prop up my daughter's cellphone so that my son-in-law in Kuwait could "sit" in on Thanksgiving dinner. He did miss out on the deviled eggs, though.*

So have a tech savvy grandchild, friend or neighbor give you a hand and/or lend you a device and get in touch with your family. And don't forget those good old things called a Christmas card, letter, or phone and keep in touch.



Check out the ornament and decoration ideas and a great old family sugar cookie recipe in Beth's Corner. *(My great aunt made these in a wood stove, so they bake at a low temperature. But I still haven't found a way to get that hint of wood smoke flavor).*

Let us know if there is anything you would like us to feature in the newsletter or any idea that would be a substitute for the monthly meeting.

I wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Look for us again in the January newsletter.

*Beth Dermody*



**Poinsettias, holly, ivy, rosemary, mistletoe, evergreen trees. There are so many plants associated with Christmas. Did you ever wonder why?**

Here's a little history lesson. Greenery was used in ancient times to celebrate the Winter Solstice by warding off evil spirits. When Christianity came to Europe, the greenery was kept but given Christian meanings.

*Holly's prickly leaves represent Jesus' crown of thorns and the berries his drops of blood.*

*Ivy clings to something to support itself as it grows and so reminds us of our need for God's support.*

*Mistletoe use goes back to the time of the Druids as a symbol of good luck, love and friendship.*

*Rosemary was thought to be the Virgin Mary's favorite plant. It is called the remembrance herb and used at Christmas as a reminder of the birth of Jesus.*

*Fir and Yew trees are evergreen and so signify everlasting life with God.*

**We are all in this together. If anyone needs a bit of computer advice or assistance, let us know.**

**If you don't know how to access Facebook or our website, we can answer your questions.**

**Let's all do this. Let's stay in touch with one another.**

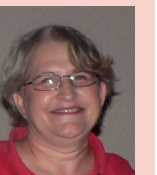
**Let's find creative ways to use technology to get us through the restrictions we're all being forced to endure.**

# MIDWEST MONTHLY GARDENING

*December is our most festive of months and twinkling lights have sprung up outside to cheer us into the Christmas season. Our weather has brought us the cold weather with most of our gardening outside completed. If you're like me it's time to buy a real Christmas tree, listen to Christmas songs and put up my holiday memories. Each decoration or ornament brings back memories. It's like bringing out old friends into the house. If you haven't finished your outside chores there's still time to complete them.*

1. **Evergreens**—Trim junipers, pines and fir branches moderately and use the trimmed branches to cover perennial beds, decorate for the holidays or use in winter containers.
2. **Perennials**—Once the ground has frozen it's time to apply mulch or cover with evergreen boughs to prevent perennials from heaving (*freezing and thawing of the soil around plants can push perennials, especially newly planted perennials, up out of the ground*) during the winter. Do not prune down all your perennials. If there are seed heads or grasses leave them for food for the birds or other wildlife.
3. **Trees and Shrubs**—Do not prune at this time but wait until the ground has fully frozen in February and March. It is all right to trim off berries or interesting seed pods for winter arrangements or containers.
4. **Annuals**—If you haven't cut down your annuals do so at this time but remember to leave them in the garden bed so any remaining seed can drop into the soil to reseed in the spring and the cut back annuals stems can also act as a covering for the garden bed.
5. **Rodents and Deer**—Occasionally take a walk around your garden throughout winter to watch for damage from rodents or deer. Watch for snow tunnels that indicate voles could be eating the roots of trees or shrubs.
6. **Birds**—Continue feeding birds through the winter months.
7. **Indoor Plants**—Reduce watering of indoor plants. The container soil doesn't dry out as quickly as it does in warmer months. Check all holiday and indoor plants for insects and diseases to prevent any long-term problems. Holiday plants can continue to be enjoyed if you keep them in a cool sunny window or put them with your indoor plant growing areas.
8. **Gardening Equipment and Tools**—This is a great time to fix, clean, sharpen or replace garden tools. You will save money if you maintain and repair your tools rather than replacing.
9. **Seed and Nursery Catalogues**—It's time to send for your seed and nursery catalogues so that you can have plenty of time during the long winter months to dream and plan changes to your garden. Ordering early ensures you'll get those seeds or plants before they sell out. Look at your garden log and pictures to see what worked and how you can improve on your ideas.

*April is a horticulturist retired from the Chicago Botanic Garden. She shares monthly gardening tips and would love to help you out with plant and gardening questions. Just [send her an email](#) and she will get back to you.*



*April Meyers*



# POINSETTIAS

*There is an old Mexican legend about how Poinsettias and Christmas come together.*

In the 1500's, there was once a poor Mexican girl called Pepita who was sad because she had no gift to give the baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve Services. Her cousin Pedro tried to cheer her up, saying "I'm sure that even the smallest gift, given by someone who loves him, will make Jesus happy."

Pepita picked a handful branches from a shrub along the roadside and made them into a small bouquet. She knelt at the altar and put the bouquet at the bottom of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the branches burst into bright red flowers, and everyone who saw them were sure they had seen a miracle. From that day on, the bright red flowers were known as the 'Flores de Noche Buena', or 'Flowers of the Holy Night'.

The shape of the poinsettia flower and leaves are sometimes thought as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem which led the Wise Men to Jesus. The red colored leaves symbolize the blood of Christ. The white leaves represent his purity.

Joel Roberts Poinsett, ambassador to Mexico from the USA, in 1828 sent the plants to South Carolina and started growing them there for friends and botanical gardens. So began poinsettias in America. They've been here so long that a number of myths have grown up around them. Maybe you've heard a few?



1. Poinsettias are poisonous. Not so. Even though the milky sap can irritate skin, a 50 pound child would have to eat 500 bracts (the colored leaves) to accumulate a level of toxin to be harmful. And they taste quite bitter, so who would eat that many?
2. Poinsettias die as soon as you bring them home. But if you water it sparingly without letting it sit in water, keeping it in the light and draft free, it will last many weeks. They can even be used as cut flowers in arrangements or bud vases.
3. All poinsettias are red. No, you all know there are poinsettias in white, cream, pink and variegated.
4. Poinsettia flower blossoms are big. No, the colored "petals" you see are actually the leaves. The flowers are really the tiny yellow berry-like structures in the center of the leaf bract.
5. Now a true fact: Poinsettias are known as Christmas Stars throughout nearly the whole world. Bursting into color in the deepest, darkest days of winter with their star-shaped leaf bracts, poinsettias represent Christmas to many people.

# POINSETTIA CARE

## Buying poinsettias

- Never buy a poinsettia sat next to a set of automatic doors that open every 30 seconds because it will have been damaged by the exposure to drafts or temperatures below 50°F which will cause the poinsettia to drop its leaves soon after being brought home.
- A healthy poinsettia plant will have intact bracts. If the little yellow buds between the colored bracts – the actual flowers – still look tight then you'll know that the quality of the poinsettia plant is good.
- If possible, check the soil before buying. It should be neither dripping wet nor totally dry, so you know it's probably had proper care.
- Finally, when you've chosen and bought your poinsettia, make sure to wrap it up in paper for the journey home to protect it from wind and cold.
- Poinsettias need warmth and light. Try to place poinsettias in a sheltered spot. Remove the foil wrapping or at least punch holes in the bottom for drainage.
- A temperature of between 60 and 72 degrees is ideal. Sufficient light is important for the plant to grow and thrive, and in the winter months, it is happy by a south-facing window.



## Watering a poinsettia plant

- Poinsettias don't like a lot of water. Always remember that it should neither dry out nor be drenched. You should water your poinsettia plant when the soil is noticeably dry. How to check? Carefully lift up the plant; if it feels light, it's time to water. Poinsettias prefer room-temperature water. Remove any excess water that is still in the planter after 10 minutes.
- If in doubt, it's better to keep poinsettias a little drier (rather than too moist) and to water them little and often, rather than rarely but in great quantity. Poinsettias are particularly long-lasting when they are fertilized once a week from about four weeks after purchase.

## Poinsettias after Christmas

- To ensure it survives until next year, you will need to prune the poinsettia in April, to about 4 in. and keep it at 55°. Repot in May and grow it in a cool and light place over summer.
- When November comes around, it is time to start forcing the plant. It will require 12 hours of bright daylight followed by 12 hours of complete darkness to alert it to the shorter days of winter, which will encourage the red flowers to flourish.





## AUNT RUTH'S SUGAR COOKIES

Preheat oven to 350° or less. I use 325°

<b>3 cups sugar</b>	<b>2 cups lard</b>
<b>4 eggs</b>	<b>1 cup buttermilk</b>
<b>2 tsp baking soda</b>	<b>½ tsp baking powder</b>
<b>1 tsp nutmeg</b>	<b>pinch of salt</b>
<b>7 cups flour, divided</b>	

1. Cream sugar and lard together.
2. Add eggs and buttermilk to sugar mixture.
3. Add baking soda, baking powder, nutmeg, salt, and 6 cups flour—one cup at a time. All this can be done with a mixer. The last cup of flour needs to be added by hand. You need enough flour to be able to roll the dough out.
4. Roll to ¼ inch thick.
5. Cut the dough in the shape of your choice with a large cookie cutter. For Christmas, I use a simple, large Wilton Christmas tree cutter.
6. Place on cookie sheet at least 2 inches apart to bake.
7. DO NOT grease cookie sheets.
8. Put colored (green for trees) granulated sugar on each cookie.
9. Bake in 325° oven for 8-10 minutes until bottoms are very lightly browned but tops are still white.
10. Remove to racks to cool.



No decorating needed. This recipe makes very large bakery-type, soft sugar cookies. Enjoy.

These are Putz Houses built by my grandkids. I helped with the cardboard houses (made with repurposed cereal, tissue, butter, or cracker boxes or any other lightweight cardboard that you can find), and they took it from there. The instructions can be found on the website [www.abeautifulmess.com](http://www.abeautifulmess.com). Click on crafts and then on holiday crafts. If anyone wants printed instructions let me know and I'll print them up.



### Space Saving Tip!

If you want a Christmas tree, but don't want to put one up or don't have the space for one, get the look by plotting out a big triangle on the wall with pencil dots. Stagger clear repositionable hooks up the sides. Then loop garland and fairy lights through each hook. Add small ball ornaments on the garland and a star on top. Nearly instant Christmas tree!

