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Fact of Month: Did

# Nature's News & Notes

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## *"PROVIDING BEAUTIFUL, HEALTHY & BALANCED LANDSCAPES"*

May we take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your confidence in allowing us to care for your landscape. We wish you and your family the happiest, healthiest holiday season and New Year.



### Pruning Dormant Trees & Shrubs



It is never too late to prune. Most trees and shrubs can be pruned any time of year. However, plants respond differently to pruning at different times of year. There are certain seasons for pruning to get certain results. The best time to prune a tree or shrub depends on how fast it is growing and when it flowers. How much to prune depends on how fast the tree is growing and how crowded the branches are. Pruning deciduous trees and

shrubs in the winter when they are dormant (no leaves), will make them grow more vigorously in the spring. The rule of thumb is to prune those woody landscape plants that bloom on current season's wood while dormant. Some of the common shrubs you prune while dormant include abelia, barberries, caryopteris, spirea, cotoneasters, and late viburnums. Depending on how high you want these to grow; you can prune them back to as much as above the first pair of buds above the soil.

A drastic version of cutting back shrubs in winter is known as "renewal" pruning. This involves cutting a shrub back to about six inches above the ground, and only is suitable for some plants. This is a good practice for these shrubs if they didn't bloom as in the past, or look overgrown with weak and straggly stems. Renewal pruning invigorates these shrubs, as drastic as it sounds and looks. Candidates for this include forsythia, honeysuckle, lilac, spirea, roses, rose of sharon, crape myrtle and weigela.

you know that...A study by the US Forest Service found that 50.8 million trees in a city's metropolitan area removed an estimated 6,145 tons of air pollutants. Air cleaning by other means would have cost an estimated \$20 million.

#### Featured Article



#### December Landscape Tips:

-Finish Leaf Clean-up, especially from lawns.

-There is still time to soil test & apply Lime to lawns.

-Don't forget anti-desiccant sprays or burlap wrap to protect valued evergreens from harsh winter weather.

-Prune ornamental and shade trees to prevent storm damage.

-Start reviewing and expanding your landscape notes to help with next year's plans.

If you can't bear to cut these shrubs totally back, or don't want the sight of an empty spot in the garden or landscape while they re-grow, cut back in stages over a three year period. With this plan, only cut back to the ground about one third of the oldest stems each year. Some rampant growers, such as forsythia, you may want to continue renewal pruning each year. This can be practiced regularly with shrubs such as lilacs, in order to keep them lower and free of damaging stem boring insects.

Pruning in winter is good in the sense that diseases are not active then to invade the open wounds. When the plants resume growth in the spring shortly after pruning, the wounds will heal rapidly. Trees that you should prune in winter or late winter include apples, flowering crabapples, hawthorn, and honey locust. These may get bacterial and other diseases if pruned in summer.

Japanese black pine has long been a favorite because of its excellent salt spray and soil salt tolerance and its function as a wind screen. The Japanese black pine & to a certain extent native Pitch pines have been attacked by the Black Turpentine beetle. The larvae, which feed on the inner bark, may completely girdle the tree. They also infect the trees with detrimental fungi. Affected trees turn a lighter green color, eventually turning brown and dying. This symptom progression will often take place within a few months. Pruning of these trees should be avoided, however if pruning of damaged, dying or hazardous branching is required, it absolutely should be done in winter, so the wounds can heal in early spring. Pruning cuts in summer quickly lead to attack from these beetles.

### Plant of the Month-Christmas Trees



Knowing a few facts about Christmas trees and their production will give you a new appreciation of them this holiday season, and may help you choose between a real tree and an artificial one. A live, balled and burlapped (B&B) Christmas tree can be your most economical and ecological purchase of the Yuletide season.

Christmas tree farms stabilize soil, protect water supplies, and provide refuge for wildlife. Often these trees can be grown on poor soils where other crops won't grow. About a half million acres are used in this country to grow Christmas trees, preserving much green space. An acre of Christmas trees produces enough daily oxygen for 18 people. The trees on farms in this country currently provide enough oxygen for 18 million people a day. While many real trees in the north are locally grown, supporting local agriculture, over 80 percent of artificial trees worldwide are made in China. No chemicals and few pesticides (if any) are used on real trees. Artificial trees are often plastic, and may contain the dangerous chemical PVC. Artificial trees also may contain metal toxins such as lead. Real Christmas trees are recyclable, often chipped into mulch at local recycling centers. The average family uses an artificial tree for 6 to 9 years before discarding, where it will remain in landfills for

centuries as they are not recyclable.

Many varieties of evergreens are grown for Christmas trees, so you have several choices depending on your own preference. The spruce has short, sharp, four-sided needles and is usually bushier than pine. However, it doesn't hold its needles as well as other varieties. The fir has flat, short needles and smooth bark. The pine has longer needles in clusters of two to five and will keep its needles for several weeks.

A wonderful option is to choose a live Christmas tree. It can give you and your family joy and beauty for many years to come. If you observe the following guidelines, you should be successful with a live tree.

-Dig the hole before Christmas when the ground is easier to work and the hole will already be prepared.

-Cover the soil with plastic and cover the hole with plywood.

-When you get the tree home, if possible let it set for a day or so in a garage or up against the warmest side of the house. This will help acclimate the tree to the warmer conditions of the inside of the home.

-Spray the tree with anti-desiccant before you bring it inside the home (and again before moving it back outdoors).

-Then bring the tree inside and place the tree in a large tub. Keep the root ball moist, even if you have to water the root ball every day. But make sure the tree is not sitting in standing water.

-Try not to keep the tree indoors for more than 14 days.

-After the holidays, take the tree back out to the garage or up against the warmest side of the house for a day or so to help acclimate the tree to the colder outdoor temperatures.

-Then take the tree to where it will be planted. Set the tree in the hole so that the top of the root ball is sitting slightly higher than ground level.

-Begin backfilling the hole, firmly tamping around the root ball as you proceed.

-Bring the soil up to the shoulder of the ball but not on top of the ball. Cut the string from around the trunk and cut the burlap away from the top of the root ball.

-When finished planting, water thoroughly.

If you will be spending the holiday at your Hamptons home and need assistance with live tree selection, care and planting let us know. Our landscape and tree specialists can assist with the entire process, including delivery and setup of the tree, digging the planting hole and moving the tree to the planting location after the holiday.

## Do Fish Sleep? And other crazy fish facts ...



Fish actually sleep.

Not in the same manner that we understand, but they do sleep. Fish do not have eyelids so they are unable to close their eyes. Instead, fish catch periods of rest by floating in one place or nestling into a cozy spot at the bottom of your pond.

Stressed out.

Koi show stress by blushing red in their fins and on their bodies. This is caused by a stressful environment, such as poor water quality. It's

their way of showing you, their caretaker, that something is wrong. They have teeth, my dear.

Koi are equipped with rather large teeth at the back of their throat. They do not use them defensively or aggressively but rather to process any hard-to-chew food they come across at the pond bottom.

**Boy or girl?**

Female koi tend to have rounder bodies and smaller, rounded pectoral fins while male koi are larger, have a sleeker shape, and their pectoral fins are larger and pointed.

**Hear, hear!**

Koi hear through a type of amplifying system called a Weberian apparatus that other fish do not have. It consists of four pairs of bones called ossicles that connect the inner ear to the swim bladder. The connection of the air chamber to the inner ear greatly improves their ability to hear.

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## Salt Damage to Plants



Most people are aware of the damage to plants that rock salt can cause. Deicing salt is usually refined rock salt consisting of about 98.5 percent sodium chloride. An obvious solution to salt damage in the landscape is to use less damaging materials. Calcium, potassium, and magnesium chloride are less toxic to plants but are more expensive & are corrosive on concrete and metals, can damage plants to some extent, yet are effective to much colder temperatures than sodium chloride (-5 degrees F or below). Of the three, magnesium chloride is recommended as the best easily available alternative to common salt. Calcium Magnesium Acetate is the material that is safest for both concrete and vegetation and works well at preventing re-icing as well. It can be applied as a granular or liquid, but is not readily available to homeowners.

While materials such as granular kitty litter and sand don't melt ice and snow, they can be used for traction. Fifty pounds of sand mixed with one pound of salt is fairly effective and less damaging to plants and soil. Our recommendation is to wait until an ice or snow event is finished, and shoveling done, before applying deicing materials. An excellent, alternative option is to apply a liquid material to surfaces just prior, or at the beginning of snowfall, these can be quite effective and less damaging. This application prevents snow from accumulating as much, therefore reducing need for plowing & shoveling with less icing to start & no need for heavy applications of salt.

When sprayed onto plants from passing cars, ocean winds and plows, buds and small twigs of some plant species lose cold hardiness and are more likely to be killed by freezing. Salt accumulation in the soil also may cause plant injury. Rock salt absorbs much of the water that would normally be available to roots. Thus, even though soil moisture is plentiful, high amounts of salt can result in a drought-like environment for plants. Trees take up the chlorine in early spring; it

enters the sap, concentrating in shoots and preventing bud openings. Meanwhile, the sodium follows the same route as tree nutrients, blocking it for magnesium and potassium, both of which are critical for the manufacture of chlorophyll. The most common result is a potassium deficiency that can inhibit resistance to drought and disease. You may not even see the damage until the following June or later when brown leaf margins suddenly appear as a tree endures its first stress of the season.

On evergreens, road, pathway or ocean facing branches have yellow and brown needles that drop off, with the color change starting at the tips of needles. Meanwhile, salt uptake from the soil causes the needles to take on a blue green cast. Deciduous trees may have unopened flower buds, twig dieback, sparse, stunted or yellow foliage and the dead giveaway, leaf scorch. Telltale scorches usually predominate on the side of the trees that receive more sun, wind, or salt spray & application. Young trees are more susceptible to salt damage because they have fewer roots than older ones. Grass along sidewalks can be completely dead due to overuse of salt.

Ultimately in areas where de-icers need be applied, select plants less likely to be damaged by salt, such as Hedge Maples, Hawthorne, Ginko, Serviceberry, Hydrangea, Winterberry, Birch, Red Oak, White or Blue Spruce, Osage orange and and Callery pear. Applying anti-dessicants to plants in areas affected by salt spray will help reduce injury. When potential salt injury is suspected, proper spring fertilization & irrigation will be critical.

We can help with snow and ice management questions and options both for homeowners and commercial establishments with a simple phone call. It is highly recommended that you have a plan prior to winter weather to prevent injury from taking place.

### Ask the Expert: Are my holiday plants poisonous?



As the holiday season rolls around, an age-old debate over safety of festive foliage resurfaces; are poinsettias, holly berries or mistletoe poisonous?

This article will attempt to dispel the myths and make known the facts regarding the toxicity associated with these plants. The poinsettia has gotten a bum rap for a number of years. It's been falsely accused of being highly poisonous.

Research studies at Ohio State University have proven that poinsettias present no significant health hazard. However, if ingested, it can irritate the mouth and stomach. The sap may cause a poison ivy-like blistering on contact with the skin on some persons unless washed off immediately. Poinsettia should be kept where children and pets cannot get to.

American mistletoe has been associated primarily with stomach upset (nausea, vomiting and diarrhea). It is important to keep this holiday beauty out of the reach of small children and pets, and to pick the leaves and berries up off of the floor immediately, if they fall.

Holly branches are used during the holidays in arrangements for the shiny dark green leaves and berries. The toxicity of holly is most

notably defined by stomach disturbances resulting from ingestion of the berries. Often nausea and vomiting can be prolonged. Large quantities cause nausea, abdominal pain, or vomiting. Small children and pets find the red berries of this plant to be especially intriguing. Therefore it is important to promptly pick up any that may fall to the ground from a household plant. Likewise, it is important to keep them out of the reach of fascinated children and curious animals.

As a point of reference, Aloe vera is a popular herb and medicinal plant that is frequently kept indoors. The gel in its leaves is used in many skin preparations, but the yellow juice next to the rubbery outer portion of the leaf can cause skin inflammation. It will also cause vomiting if ingested. So enjoy all your indoor plants, just make sure to keep them away from pets and children.

Questions or Comments: [Ask the Expert](#)

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