



Grimes County Master Gardeners



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Mistletoe—Friend or Foe



We all know that one Christmas tradition is to hang mistletoe in a doorway and kiss your loved one. But is mistletoe a friendly plant or a bad one? Mistletoe is an interesting plant in that it holds its green color in the branches of a tree long after the tree goes dormant. It's called a partial parasite meaning that it can grow on its own, but it will typically suck the nutrients and water out of a tree to survive. In small quantities, they are relatively benign, but if left to grow in large numbers, they can take too much from a tree and cause it to die.

Where does the word mistletoe come from? Ancient Anglo-Saxons noticed that mistletoe often grew where birds left droppings, which is how mistletoe got its name: In Anglo-Saxon, "mistel" means "dung" and "tan" means "twig," hence, "dung-on-a-twig." Mistletoes produce white berries, each containing one sticky seed that can attach to birds and mammals for a ride to new growing sites.

While there are many types of mistletoe the one most commonly used as a Christmas decoration (*Phoradendron flavescens*) is native to North America. The other type of mistletoe (*Viscum album*) is found in Europe and is more of a green shrub with small, yellow flowers and white berries that are considered poisonous.

In history, mistletoe was viewed as a magical, mysterious, and sacred plant. It was considered a fertility plant with aphrodisiac qualities by the ancient Celtic Druids, who gathered it in mid-summer and winter during special fertility ceremonies. In the Middle Ages, branches of mistletoe were hung from the ceiling to ward off evil spirits or prevent witches' entrance. In Norse mythology, it was considered a sign of peace to kiss under the plant.

It has also been thought that mistletoe has cancer-fighting properties, which are being tested at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. There is research to suggest that mistletoe can diminish the side effects of traditional cancer therapy by helping patients tolerate chemotherapy better.

Most gardeners consider mistletoe a nuisance and problem for their trees. Even though they are thought to have some healing properties, it is best for your tree's survival to remove them when found. One of the most effective ways to eliminate mistletoe is to cut the affected branch from the tree completely. If that is not feasible, you can cut the mistletoe at the point where it is attached to the tree, but since its roots are in the tree, you will have to repeat this method often so that the plant cannot mature and produce seeds. Another approach is to cut out the mistletoe and then wrap the exposed area in black plastic and twine to prevent it from getting needed sunlight. This may have to be repeated if the plastic disintegrates.



A Gardener's Christmas Poem



‘Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the yard,
The branches were bare and the ground frozen hard.

The roses were dormant and mulched all around
To protect them from damage if frost heaves the ground;

The perennials were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of fertilizer danced in their heads;

The newly planted shrubs had been soaked by a hose,
To settle their roots for a long winter’s doze;

And out on the lawn the new fallen snow
Protected the roots of the grasses below;

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a Prius full of gifts of gardening gear;

St. Nick was the driver a jolly old elf,
And he winked as he said, “I’m a gardener myself.”

I’ve brought new seeds and light systems, too,
Give them a try and see how they do.

To eliminate weeding, I brought bags of mulch,
To attract the pollinators I have flowers for best results.

To add to your joy, I’ve plenty of herbs
And ornamental grasses for your hell strip curb.

For seed planting days, I’ve a trowel and a dibble,
And a roll of wire mesh if the rabbits should nibble.

I have the latest books, plus some gadgets you’ll love;
Plant stakes and frames, and waterproof gloves.

Here are sharp shears and a new compost pit
And, for pH detecting, a soil testing kit.

With these colorful flagstones, lay a new garden path.
For the view from your window, a bird feed and bath.

And last but not least, some well-rotted manure,
A green garden year-round, these gifts will ensure.

Then, jolly St. Nick having emptied his load,
Started his Prius and took on the road.

And I heard him exclaim through the motor’s quiet hum,

“Merry Christmas to all, and to all a Green Thumb!”

The Benefits of Rainwater



Do you know all the reasons why rainwater is much better than tap or well water for gardens and landscapes? Have you ever noticed that your plants look so much better after a heavy rainfall than if you watered with the same amount of tap water? Here are several scientific reasons why rainwater is like gold for your plants:

- **Nitrogen:** 78% of rainwater is nitrogen. Nitrogen is what makes your plants look so much greener after a nice day of rain. The nitrogen in the form of nitrates and ammonium are immediately taken in by plants through their roots and leaves.
- **Oxygen:** Rainwater contains more oxygen than tap water. Compared to heavy rainfall, the same amount of tap water can cause your plants to become waterlogged by bringing about anaerobic soil conditions that can lead to root rot. But rainwater is highly oxygenated, which helps even out soil saturation.
- **Carbon Dioxide:** Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere combines during rainfall with other minerals to impart an acidic pH. When the rainwater is slightly acidic, it helps the soil release micronutrients such as zinc, manganese, copper, and iron essential to plant growth.
- **Salt:** Another benefit of rainfall is that it helps leach out salts at the root level. An accumulation of salt in the soil can inhibit plant growth, so leaching it out through rainwater can produce improved plant growth.
- **Uniformity:** The simple fact that rainwater falls uniformly in your garden means that all the soil is leached, and the farthest reaches of a plant's root zone will be cleansed of salt.
- **Cleansing:** Just the cleansing effect of rainfall helps rinse mineral deposits, dust, and pollutants on leaves, which help increase photosynthesis.

Tap water has additives like chlorine to disinfect and fluoride to prevent cavities. However, nearly all plants are susceptible to chlorine toxicity which is visible by burned leaf margins, discoloring and spotted leaves. To remedy hard mineral deposits in tap water, sodium is added in water softeners. Too much sodium is also toxic to plants and causes sediment build up on their leaves.

Rainwater harvesting is the best way to capture and use this precious resource for your plants. If you don't have some type of rainwater catchment, read up on how easy it is to set up a system that will provide endless benefits for your plants.

What's the Difference Between a Frost & a Freeze?



As we enter winter, even a mild one, there will be plenty of days where we will experience frigid cold weather. So, what is the difference between a frost and a freeze? Before a frost or freeze, the weather channels will usually issue an advisory. These advisories generally fall into three categories:

Frost Advisory: This occurs when the temperature is expected to fall between 36 degrees down to 32 degrees.

Freeze Warning: A warning is usually issued when there is at least an 80% chance that the temperatures will hit 32 degrees or lower.

Hard Freeze: This takes place when the temperature falls below 28 degrees.

Light Frosts: As air temperatures cool, the ground begins to give off heat. This is called *radiational cooling*. Generally, the clearer the sky, the more heat the earth gives off. For a frost to kill plants, the ground has to lose enough heat that a freezing temperature occurs at ground level. If the ground is still warm, it is possible for the frost to hover a bit above the ground level. That's what happens when the tops of plants are killed by frost, but the lower portions remain green. This is generally referred to as a light frost. Frosts also tend to be short-term events that occur overnight or in the early hours of morning. Hardy plants can usually take this kind of cold temperature, but plants that typically are frost-tender will be damaged.

Hard Freezes: Freezes are usually the result of *advective cooling*. What does that mean? It's the transference of some atmospheric condition such as heat, humidity or cold by the movement of an air mass. An arctic blast falls into this category. Freezes can be quick or can linger. If it's cold enough, even a short freeze can do a lot of damage.

How to protect your plants:

- If an advisory is issued for your area, put down covers like sheets, blankets, baskets but never plastic. Plastic or vinyl materials are normally too thin to provide adequate insulation. Since they do not breathe, moisture can get trapped inside. If temperatures drop low enough, this moisture will freeze on your plants, causing more harm than good. Instead of plastic, use natural fabrics like cotton or linen, an opened burlap bag, or newspaper.
- If you keep your plants well-watered they will be insulated from the cold. Wet soil holds more heat than dry soil. Even during a short frost spraying water onto your plants will insulate them but don't try this for a hard freeze.
- Mulch, mulch, mulch. Mulching keeps the roots and soil protected during a hard freeze. It won't protect the tops of plants but it will keep the ground warm enough to stop the roots from freezing.



Events

Grimes County Master Gardeners will have their **December Business Meeting on Tuesday, December 8th—9:00 a.m.** This will be a **zoom only meeting**.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, no continuing education classes are available except for virtual learning and webinars.

December 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 	3 	4 	5 
6	7	8 	9 	10 	11	12
13	14	15	16 	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Continuing Education

For registration information please email Lindsey Munyon at lindseymunyon@ag.tamu.edu:

- Dec 2: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series, “Cool Season Annual Color”, 10—11 a.m.
- Dec 9: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series, “Winter Bulb Care and Division”, 10—11 a.m.
- Dec 16: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series, “Horticulture Myths”, 10—11 a.m.

Other Learning Events:

- Dec 2: Aggie Horticulture Facebook, “December Garden Checklist”, 1:00 p.m.
- Dec 3: Home Grown Lecture Series, Harris County AgriLife; “Food Preservation”, 10:00 a.m.
- Dec 4: Aggie Horticulture Facebook, “What’s Growing on at the Tyler Botanical Gardens”, 1:00 p.m.
- Dec 5: Urban Harvest Facebook, “Nature’s Pest Control”, 11:30 a.m.
- Dec 10: Home Grown Lecture Series, Harris County AgriLife; “Ask an Agent”, 11:00 a.m.

Texas Master Gardeners

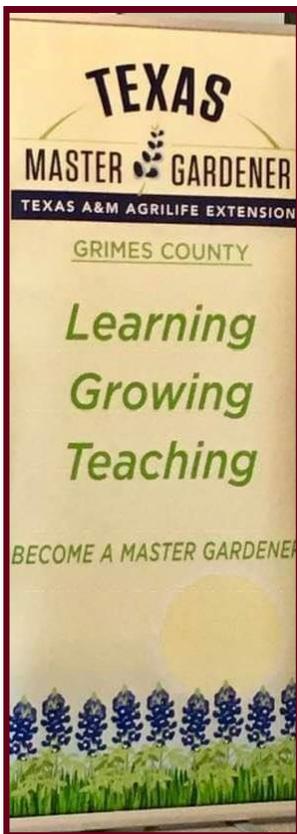
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Grimes County Master Gardeners

Please send submissions and photos by the 20th of each month to: pwparmley@gmail.com



2020 Board of Directors

- President.....Cathey Hardeman
- Vice PresidentJamie Bruns
- SecretaryPaula Parmley
- TreasurerHerb Abraham

2020 Committees/Chairs

- Advertising/PublicityPeggy Sloan
- Auditing.....Jena Jackson
- Community Garden.....Cathey Hardeman
- Co-op.....Fred Vesperman
- Social Media.....Jamie Bruns
- FundraisingCarol Garnet
- Historian.....Sharon Murry
- Intern Class Coordination.....Herb Abraham
- Junior Master Gardener.....Kay Douglas
- NewsletterPaula Parmley
- Nominating.....Carol Garnet
- Timekeeping.....Martha Brogdon
- TMGA AwardsSharon Murry