



## December is For Poinsettias, Tree Bark, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker



Male sapsucker-Cornell University

## Poinsettias



Poinsettias are native to Mexico and are grown in greenhouses started from cuttings as early as July 4. The small flowers are overshadowed by the colorful bracts that begin to change color as day length decreases. Bracts come in many colors according to cultivars, and some also have striking patterns. Shown above are 'Superb New Glitter' on the left and 'Picasso'. While poinsettias are not poisonous, some people may have skin sensitivity to the white latex sap.



**Alaska poinsettia shown above has white holly shaped leaves and bracts**



# Poinsettias

## Tree Bark



Winter is a great time to get a better look at tree bark and try to identify the tree from its bark, form, and bud features. Shown above clockwise from top left- American hornbeam *Carpinus caroliniana*, sycamore *Platanus occidentalis*, and chestnut oak *Quercus prinus*. All are native here in Connecticut.

[https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2019/03/bark-great-way-identify-trees-winter`](https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2019/03/bark-great-way-identify-trees-winter)

## Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers



Yellow-bellied sapsuckers stop here in early spring and late fall as they migrate through. They resemble downy woodpeckers that fell in a sooty chimney, with males having a red throat patch. Unlike the downy, the folded wing has a broad, vertical white stripe. These birds tap into the bark of trees in shallow lines, often returning to the same trees year after year. They have a strong preference for thin-barked trees like birch and crabapple, but can tap into sap on other trees as well. These sapwells provide sapsuckers with sugary energy and sometimes an insect or two. Damage can normally heal over but is unsightly.

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Yellow-bellied\\_Sapsucker/id#](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Yellow-bellied_Sapsucker/id#)

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## Gardening Gift Ideas



Polling colleagues recently, these are the top gardening-themed gifts on their list: quality small pruners, straight-edged spade, gloves, canvas carry-all garden stool, mushroom starter kit with a small, fresh oak or maple log thrown in for good measure, two-wheeled garden cart, thick kneeling pad, pre-paid UConn soil test kit.

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## Crop Talk

For the latest UConn Extension and Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture edition of **Crop Talk** click on link below. Featured: upcoming programs on ag mechanics training, rotation between fruit crops, using beneficial nematodes to combat fungal gnats, and **Farm Risk Management Video Series**. This is good information for growers and farmers.

Also, a goodbye to our fruit crops integrated pest management program coordinator, Mary Conklin. Her knowledge and help to fruit growers has been an exceptional asset to UConn.

[Crop Talk NOVEMBER 2021-1.pdf](#)

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## Plant Highlight- Tiger's Eye Mushroom





The tiger's eye mushroom, *Coltricia perennis*, is one of only a few polypore fungi that forms a cup-like fruiting body. It is found in woodlands containing some pines here in North America. It has attractive, concentric rings and unlike most polypore fungi, the tiger's eye grows in the soil, seldom on dead wood. Cap is disk-like and funnels down in the center.

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[https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/coltricia\\_perennis.shtml](https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/coltricia_perennis.shtml)

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## Invasive Plant Highlight - Oriental Bittersweet



Readily seen weighing down trees along highways and just about anywhere else, this introduced, invasive, twining woody vine, *Celastrus orbiculatus*, chokes out and strangles native plants. It can grow as tall as the plant it is climbing on, and often adds so much weight to trees that they may fall over during heavy, wet snowfalls. Fruit is attractive yellow and red and was, and is, used for decorations. Birds will eat the fruit in late winter, but normally only after most other fruit sources are gone. Control of bittersweet is tedious and requires patience. Pull up any volunteer seedlings and check out tactics for dealing with more mature plants.

<https://extension.psu.edu/oriental-bittersweet>

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## Insect Highlight - Paper Wasp Nests



With the falling of autumn leaves, the presence of paper wasp nests, especially those of bald-faced hornets, is evident. While objects of interest to many people, they are no longer housing any wasps. Only mated queens survive winters in New England, and they do not remain in the nests. Females do not use these nests the next year but will begin building new ones in the spring to start a new colony.

<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1992/4-29-1992/wasp.html>

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## **Subscribe to the UMass Landscape Message**

UMass Extension's Landscape Message is an educational newsletter intended to inform and guide Massachusetts Green Industry professionals in the management of our collective landscape. Detailed reports from scouts and Extension specialists on growing conditions, pest activity, and cultural practices for the management of woody ornamentals, trees, and turf are regular features.

**UMass Landscape Message**

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## KNOWLEDGE TO GROW ON - Read our latest Ladybug blogs

[It Was a Berry Good Year](#)

[Tips for Choosing the Perfect Christmas tree](#)

[Things of Interest in the November Landscape](#)



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## Gardening Tips for December

1. Run mowers until they are out of gas to prevent issues with starting next spring.
2. Sharpen and clean garden tools and store for the winter.

3. Do not prune spring blooming evergreens like rhododendrons and azaleas as some flower buds will be lost
4. Do not plant evergreen shrubs now as they do not have time to develop strong roots before possible ground freeze. Winter damage can result from late season planting of evergreens.
5. Order seed catalogues now and consider ordering early while most seeds are available.
6. Water newly planted trees and shrubs as needed before the ground freezes
7. Mulch perennials that are susceptible to winter kill after ground freezes.
8. Protect any shrubs that are susceptible to winter wind damage, like rhododendrons and cherry laurels. A breathable light-colored fabric can be stapled to a frame and secured to the ground on the windward side of these shrubs.
9. Check any stored bulbs and tubers every 2 weeks to make sure they are not rotting. If tubers, like dahlias, are shriveling, mist lightly with water.
10. Certain fruit trees can be pruned during the winter but research any temperature limitations that may apply for the variety of tree.
11. If voles are an issue during the winter, put wire grid barrier material around the base of shrubs or small trees that voles may damage.



Tree protected from heavy snow falling off roof by a sturdy wooden frame. This evergreen can still photosynthesize as needles are in the open.

**For a more extensive list of tips visit [Gardening Tips for December](#)**



## Have Your Soil Tested for Macro- & Micro Nutrients?

It is not too late to send your soil samples in for testing. **Prices will increase January 1, 2022.** For details on submitting a sample, go to [UConn Soil and Nutrient Laboratory](#).

Photo by dmp, UConn

[UConn Soil Nutrient Analysis Laboratory](#)

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[UConn Science of GMOs](#)

## Things to do/events

[Connecticut Trail Finder](#)- Connecticut Trail Finder is a new resource for those looking to explore the Nutmeg State's 2,000 miles of trails.

[Essex Steam Train North Pole Express](#)- Christmas train rides along the Connecticut River are available for December 2021, on a limited basis. This is a fun ride, but make sure to dress warm.



[Connecticut River Museum](#)- Visit annual exhibits like the Christmas holiday train layout and permanent exhibits like the first American submarine dubbed "the turtle".

**[Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge-](#)** Ten units across 70 miles of the CT coastline provide opportunities for viewing birds, wildlife and several historic buildings including the Falkner Island lighthouse.

**[Wood Library Gingerbread festival-](#)** Enjoy the replicas of historic buildings and other houses made of gingerbread by artists, children, and community members.



**[James L. Goodwin State Forest-](#)** trail maps are available on-line. Contact them for any upcoming guided tours and other events

**[CT Flower & Garden Show-](#)** Held February 24-27, 2022. Come visit our booth, bring a half cup of soil for a free pH test, meet our staff and UConn Master Gardeners who can answer your gardening questions.

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## Outdoor Holiday Decorations Using Fresh Greenery



Greenery cut fresh from woods or gardens will be fresher than any bought at retail places. Pine, cedar, holly, boxwood, and ivy are commonly used in wreaths, garlands, and planters. Eastern red cedar has blue fruit that adds interest, and pinecones can be added as well. The red berries shown above are from a winterberry cultivar in a landscape planting that is called Berry Heavy™. Spruce and cedar make up the rest of this composition. Below is likely the runner up (or winner!) in the “Worst Holiday Planter Holiday Decoration Effort” contest.



<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/holiday-decorating-with-fresh-greenery/>

## Food for thought

One day's production for a high-producing dairy cow yields 4.8 pounds of butter, 8.7 gallons of ice cream or 10.5 pounds of cheese. **For more Fast Facts About Agriculture and Food, see the Information published in the**



American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture's *Food and Farm Facts book (2021 edition)*.

<https://www.fb.org/newsroom/fast-facts>

## Weather/ Environment



**Real Christmas trees: History, facts, and environmental impacts. They are recyclable, renewable and emit fresh oxygen while absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> and other gases. An acre of Christmas trees provides the daily oxygen requirements of 18 people.**

[https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/real\\_christmas\\_trees\\_history\\_facts\\_and\\_environmental\\_impacts](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/real_christmas_trees_history_facts_and_environmental_impacts)

## Who knew?



At least half of the world's oxygen production comes from the ocean, produced by plankton that drifts in the sea as it photosynthesizes. Decaying algal blooms consume oxygen more quickly than it can be replenished, and sometimes "dead zones" occur temporarily that cannot support marine life.

<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ocean-oxygen.html>



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