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Garden Club



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Welcome to The Paul Parent Newsletter December 24th, 2013

Telephone:



Mistletoe

*Nowadays it is mostly used
as an excuse to steal a kiss.*

Every holiday seems to have its own flowers and decorations, and Christmas is no exception. We have greens and pine boughs from our yards, but have you ever wondered how some of these other plants were selected for the holiday?

When you consider mistletoe, most people think of kissing. At Christmas, mistletoe is as identified with the holiday as the wishbone is to Thanksgiving tradition. Mistletoe is a parasite plant; that means it lives on tree branches and steals what it needs from that tree. It does make its own food but relies on the host tree for water and other minerals. Mistletoe only dies when the tree dies. It loves to grow on the top branches of trees. It prefers mostly leaf trees but when those are not available, evergreens will do.

The foliage of the mistletoe is leathery and the fruit resembles a cluster of tiny pearls. Be warned, the seed in the fruit are very poisonous! If you have small children, decorate with the plastic berry type. Mistletoe is nearly indestructible, thriving under difficult growing conditions. Wind, rain and drought do not affect its growth. Insects do not like or bother with this plant.

Because the plant grows on the top branches of trees it is not easily harvested for the holidays. Long poles with hooks are

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used to pull it off the tree. In rural areas, the tree branches that mistletoe grows on are shot off by experienced hunters. This method is much faster and less time consuming--and it's a lot safer than climbing each tree to harvest the plant.

Scandinavian mythology includes the tradition of hanging mistletoe as a cure-all for many ills. Ancient Greeks considered it an antidote to poison. It was also thought to protect from fire and keep out evil spirits and witches. Swiss hunters used bow and arrows to shoot down the plant, and if the falling mistletoe was caught in left hand, it was believed the hunter had a panacea for all his children's diseases. Generations of farmers used it in the fields to protect their crops from insect and diseases.

Today, this plant has only one purpose: keeping the Christmas spirit alive with hospitality, fun and merriment throughout the holiday season. This Christmas, you can have fun with this plant that grows in high places: Be sure to obey the rules of kissing under the mistletoe. Pick a berry, kiss once; two berries, two kisses. When the berries are gone, stop until next year. So, you'd better stock up for the holidays!





The Top TEN Hanging Foliage Plants for Holiday Gifts

If you're still looking for the perfect gift for your gardening friends and family, here are the plants I recommend you select for them this year. Hanging foliage plants make a great present and most of them will cost you under \$25.00 each. With the long gray day of winter ahead of us now, a nice hanging plant in your window will help to bring sunshine into your home this winter. So visit your local greenhouse or garden center and take a look at these plants. If you're purchasing several plants and you're busy with holiday shopping, have them hold them for you until the weekend, and that will also give them time to clean the foliage and wrap the plants for you.

Piggyback Plant

A wonderful foliage plant that grows in ball shape mound of soft green foliage. The leaf is in the shape of a maple leaf; it is covered with fine stiff hair on the top surface. The leaf is on a long stem that is also covered with hair. What gives this plant much of its character is that when the leaf has matured it will begin to form a new plant where the leaf stem and the leaf meet. A small cluster of new leaves will begin to form, giving the plant a nice soft look. You can enjoy the new plants that form on the foliage or pick off a few leaves that have started to produce new plants and stick them in a pot of fresh potting soil. Keep one inch of

stem, dip in rooting powder and push stem into the soil. Roots will form in a couple of weeks and in a couple of months your single leaf plant will mature to a 6 inch mound of foliage. Piggyback plants grow best in a bright window but do not like the summer sun. The plant does best in a cool room--50 to 70 degrees--and should be fertilized monthly all year with a house plant fertilizer like Ferti-lome Blooming and Rooting or Osmocote pellet fertilizer. Keep plants moist but not wet; if your home is warm, misting of the foliage will benefit the plant, especially if you're heating with wood or have forced hot air heat. Insect problems are minimal and the plant is easy to grow even for the beginning gardener.

Wandering Jew

This plant is extremely easy to grow and valued for its colorful foliage, which is striped with shades of purple, white, and green. Some varieties will have a solid green or purple underside, giving the plant additional character. The leaves form on stiff stems that grow quickly and cascade down--often growing 2 to 3 feet long in just a year or less. Plants do best in a window with bright to average sunlight, where the room stays at 60 to 70 degrees year-round. Fertilize monthly and water when needed, as the plants do best when allowed to dry between each watering, especially during the winter months. When the plant becomes too long for your window, just cut it back, and root the new growth on the tip of the branches. Make a cut just below a leaf node 3 to 4 inches long and dip in rooting powder, Put 3 to 5 cuttings in a 4 inch pot filled with fresh potting soil and keep moist. Roots will form in just 7 to 10 days. Insect problems are minimal and the plant is recommended for new gardeners, especially if it is their first time growing house plants in the window.

Heartleaf Philodendron

A very easy to grow and versatile hanging plant for the gardener who has moderate to low light in the windows. The plant will tolerate temperatures from 55 to 75 degrees and do very well in a room that is heated with a wood stove or forced hot air heat system. The leaves are in the shape of a small delicate heart and are naturally waxy looking--often showy with great luster. Plants do best when kept moist but during the winter months allow the soil to become slightly dry between each watering.

Fertilize monthly year round with general purpose plant food or Osmocote plant pellets. Vining stems will cascade easily, or you can wrap stems around container to produce a more ball shaped plant--or just prune the long stems to control the size of the plant. You can take tip cuttings 3 to 4 inches long just below a leaf node and dip in rooting powder for quick root formation, and in just 2 weeks the new roots will form. The Heartleaf Philodendron will make a great plant for the first time gardener or an older and more experienced gardener who likes something more dainty looking for a big window or plant room.

Prayer Plant

This is a plant that has the ability to fold its leaves prayer-like in response to darkness. In the morning, the sunlight will cause the leaves to resume their horizontal position. Plants do great in a north or east window or even under fluorescent lights in an office. Plants do best when kept warm--65 to 80 degrees-- and with raised humidity, by misting the plant a few days a week or keeping it in a room with a humidifier. Fertilize monthly year-round and water to keep the soil moist at all times (but not wet). The leaf is oval, 4 to 6 inches long and 4 inches wide, with a rounded tip. The leaf has a mottled look with several shades of green to black colored bands and also orange lines that give the leaf a peacock feather look. The plant tends to grow more horizontally than cascading like other types of hanging baskets. A very easy-to-grow plant for all levels of knowledge about growing plants. The plant has few problems with insects.

Goldfish Plant

Here is a wonderful hanging plant with rich dark green foliage that is shiny and compact growing. As a bonus, the plant will produce bright orange goldfish-shaped flowers by the dozens spring until fall--or place the plant in a south-facing window and add a plant grow light for flowers all year long. The plant grows best in a warm room from--65 to 75 degrees--and it will not tolerate drafts. Feed every two weeks when in bloom and then monthly when flowering has stopped for the year. Keep soil moist when in bloom and then allow to almost dry out between each watering when the plant is not in flower. Good humidity around the plant encourages it to grow better and flower more often. Dry, hot rooms that have hot air heat or wood stoves will have few to no flowers and plants will tend to grow more opened. The new growth tends to grow with arching branches and cascades downwards, making a nice hanging plant. DO NOT MIST plants during the winter, as fungus disease can develop. Keep plants indoors during the summer months, as this plant will do best if kept inside year round. Direct sunlight during the months of October to May and bright east window exposure rest of the year is needed for the best growth. A little extra work is needed to care for this plant but you will be rewarded with beautiful flowers for your efforts.

Strawberry Begonia

If your window space is limited, then this is one of the plants you want growing in your window. This carefree plant loves bright light and east or even a west facing window. Plants do best in a cool room 50 to 70 degrees. Water as needed but keep soil moist spring to fall and water less while dormant from fall to winter season. Fertilize monthly year round when watering.

The foliage will grow in rosettes, like the foliage of a strawberry plant in your garden--and some plants will have red hair growing on the foliage and stems of the plant. The underside of the foliage is often

red, giving the plant additional character. The foliage is often mottled with white streaks in the leaf or there are green and white variegated varieties available for contrast. Mature plants produce robust crops of little plantlets born on dangling runners up to 24 inches long that add to the charm of this plant. The plantlets can be easily rooted to make new plants. This is an easy to care for plant for the beginner or season gardener and one that should be considered for a gift plant.

Spider Plant

This is the best plant for the beginner gardener and makes an excellent house plant. The plant has strap-like leaves that are variegated green and white. Plants with a white center and green outer edge are stronger growing than the green center and white edge. Spider plants are the top air cleaner plants for your home; they remove airborne pollutants. Plants grow best in bright to moderate light windows year round. The spider plant loves a warm to hot room with temperatures 65 to 75 degrees and warmer for the best growth. Fertilize every month all year long and water as needed, keeping the soil moist from spring to fall and watering less from fall and during the winter months when most plants grow very little due to short days.

If your plant begins to develop brown tips you could be on a public water system and fluoride and other minor contaminants could be present in the water. If this is a

problem with your plant, fill a container with water the night before watering your plants and let sit out until the morning. In the morning mix the water to release the gas bubbles and water your plants. To start new plants, just pull small spider plants from the long cascading stems and push plant in pots filled with soil. New plants will root in a week or two and quickly begin to grow quickly into large and productive plants. Every home needs to have a spider plant in a window and small spider plants in a glass of water or pot of soil on the window sill.

Pothos

This plant has the reputation as the plant that is easiest to grow in your home! The plant produces long stems that cascade down from the rim of the pot, and that cascading vine has nice shiny heart-shaped leaves covering it. The leaves are 2 to 4 inches long and have a natural shine to them, giving the plant a pleasant appearance. The heart-shaped leaf is often variegated green and white in color and the best plants those with deeper green and less white coloration on them. The new varieties of pothos with more white than green coloration are nice but not as strong growing as the deeper green varieties.

These plants do well in low light to bright light and prefer temperatures of above 60 degrees or warmer for the best growth. Water evenly all year but the plant will tolerate dryer conditions during the winter months. Yellow foliage usually means too

much water is being given to the plant. Insect problems are minimal; this is another plant to consider for the beginner gardener. The pothos also makes a wonderful plant for your office. If you have cats that play with your plants, damaging the foliage, this plant will stop the damage, as it produces a nonlethal poisonous sap that will cause a burning sensation in the mouth of the cat; the cat will stop playing with your plants quickly.

English Ivy

This is a plant that has hundreds of varieties available to you, with different leaf sizes, leaf textures, leaf coloration and even leaf shapes. The leaves are produced on strong wiry stems that cascade down from the rim of the pot to a length of 2 to 4 feet long. The leaves will grow 2 to 4 inches long and are glossy and colorful. Plants prefer a brightly lit window and moderate light during the winter. The plant will tolerate cool temperatures from 50 to 70 degrees and even a drafty window during the winter months. Fertilize monthly year round and water to keep the soil moist at all times even in the winter months. The vines can also be trained to grow up on a wire frame to create a wreath in a pot or trained to become topiary grown on a wire form. This is an easy-to-grow-plant for the beginner or adventurous gardener who is looking for a challenge to create a unique looking plant.

String of Pearls

Now here is a unique looking hanging plant that has foliage like no other plant out there. The plant is considered to be in the succulent family and resembles a long strong cascading string with pea-like ball-shaped foliage. The lime green foliage looks like peas attached to the side of the cascading string. The plant loves the heat--60 to 80 degrees inside your home--and does best in a full sun window facing south. Water as needed but allow the soil to almost dry out between each watering. Run the plant on the dry side during the winter months. Fertilize monthly all year long when you water the plant. Use the same care as with a jade plant and keep plants away from

drafty windows. If a branch of pea-shaped foliage should break from the plant, just lay it on the top of a pot of soil and it will quickly root to the soil and develop new plants from the vine. This is an easy-to-care-for plant as long as you go easy on the watering, especially during the winter months. Perfect for the experienced gardener or one who needs a plant that will do real well in a hot and dry room that has a wood stove.



The holidays are over, the tree was beautiful. But soon it will be time to take it down and recycle it. However, recycle it how? Here are a few ideas for you this year--and none of them involves the town dump.

If you live near the seashore, check with the town, as some towns will take the tree and place it in the sand dunes to catch the sand when the wind blows or to prevent storm erosion by the waves.

If you have blue hydrangeas, roses or tender perennials, cut the branches from the tree and place them around the plants to help cut the force of the wind on them

during the winter. This will also block the sun from drying out the delicate branches. (Like a teepee around the plants.)

For newly planted evergreen ground covers like English Ivy, pachysandra and small junipers lay the branches over them for the winter. It will help to keep foliage green and prevent dehydration.

If you cut the branches into small pieces, you could add them to a compost pile. It will take time but they will break down to beautiful soil.

If you feed the birds during the winter, place the tree near the feeder and it will give them shelter when those big snowstorms arrive. The tree will also give them a place to hide and check out the area for the neighbor's cat before they go to the feeder.

If you do crafts, then cut the branches from the tree and place them in a black plastic trash bag. Put the bag in a sunny location outside and make sure water does not get inside the bag. In just a few weeks, the needles will all fall off. Now you can use them to make those fragrant balsam pillows that will keep any room fresh smelling like the great outdoors.

Some towns will accept the trees and chip them into mulch, to be used around the town to cover flowerbeds. It takes time to rot but the tree will not fill the landfill site. Never try to burn the tree outside! The tree will be dry and it will almost explode into flames with all the pitch in the needles!

You enjoyed the tree for the Christmas

season; now let's put it to good use and help Mother Nature keep the planet healthy.

The Fragrant World



of Gardenias

You should try to grow the most fragrant flowering plant--the gardenia--in your home this winter. It will not be as easy as African violets but the extra work will be worth the effort. The gardenia has beautiful dark green foliage and in the southern part of the country, it is considered evergreen. The leaves are

glossy like a leather couch. The flowers have double petals that are creamy white in color but the fragrance is the "winning trait" of this plant! When in bloom, it will quickly fill a room with a fragrance that you will never forget, like the lilac does in springtime.

Gardenias originated in Japan and China. They love a very bright to sunny window all year. They will do well on the patio or deck for the summer but put them back indoors in September. Hot during the summer and warm indoors during the winter--65 degrees or warmer.

Never water the plant with cold water but keep the plant moist at all times. This plant LOVES acid soils like the rhododendron plant does. Be sure to never add lime to the plant soil. Fertilize with acid base fertilizer such as Mir-Acid liquid plant food monthly or Holly Tone granular plant food a couple times a year.

When you purchase a plant, look at the pot carefully as it will tell you by its shape if it needs to be transplanted. New plants from Florida will be shipped to your greenhouse in straight-sided pots! These new plants are grown in special benches with timed controlled watering and feedings. They grow fast, full, filled with buds but they need to be transplanted to a larger pot when you get home. Use real-soil potting soil, not artificial soil, as it will dry up too fast. This is the first important thing to do for your new plant. Keep moist until the roots grow into the new soil you use when potting.

When the buds appear, your work has just begun. High humidity around the plant foliage is necessary and daily misting of the plant is necessary. Measure the spread of the foliage and buy a saucer as large as the plant is wide. Now fill the saucer with small stones like marble chips. Place the plant on the stones and every morning add water to the saucer to the bottom of the pot. During the day, the water will evaporate and the moisture will help to create moisture around the leaves, humidity. Keep a mister bottle filled with water near the plant and every time you see it, spray the foliage and the buds.

Finally and most important, gardenias will not survive in homes with forced hot air heat, wood stoves or drafty windows. They are worth all the work when those flowers pop open.

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