



Evergreen Garden Club

# WILD IRIS



December 2021



**NEXT EGC MEETING  
TUESDAY DECEMBER 14, 2021  
BERGEN FIRE STATION**

***DECEMBER'S PROGRAM WILL BE  
OUR ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY***

***9:00 am – 11:00 am***

*See details below*

**November 9, 2021**  
**Evergreen Garden Club General Meeting**

The meeting was called to order by President Cherie Luke at 9:33am. The meeting was held at the Church of the Hills, 28628 Buffalo Park Rd, Evergreen, CO. Board members present were Hannah Hayes, Vice President; Kim Gustafson, 2nd Vice President; Julie Ann Courim, Technology Officer and Janet Gluskoter, Secretary. Not in attendance: Helen McLeman, Treasurer.

**President's Report** - Cherie introduced our new board member, Kim Gustafson taking the position of 2nd Vice President. After asking if anyone was interested in helping with the Forest Heights Lodge project, it was determined that, due to COVID, the Lodge is currently suspending their inpatient services. Cherie announced that there are local garden calendars for sale. Surprisingly there were no November birthdays today.

**Secretary's Report** - October minutes were approved by the board and submitted to Louise Heern for publication in the November Wild Iris. The Standard Operating Procedures are currently being updated and will be reviewed at the next board meeting.

**Treasurer's Report** - No report this month.

**Vice President's Report** - Hannah stated that we are ready for the Christmas party next month and reminded everyone that there will be a craft table and please bring a small gift for exchange (\$10.00).

**2nd Vice President's Report** - Kim stated that there are currently 54 members paid, 10 businesses paid and 5 businesses finalizing payment. She listed each of the businesses and stated that they can be found on our EGC website with links to their own websites as well as in our directory.

**Technology Officer's Report** - Julie Ann reported that all is good on the tech front.

#### **Committee Reports**

**Welcoming Coordinator** - Cindy Gibson introduced two guests: Shelly Wilcox and Lisa Vanderburg  
New members in attendance: Mary Dreger, Yda Schreuder, Rae Peters and Kim Gustafson.


**Public Gardens Coordinator** - Annell Hoy asked the garden leads to contact her for new member information if there is a need for help in your garden.

**Garden Tour Coordinator** - Louise Heern stated that she will begin organizing after the holidays. It was asked if there will be a plant sale during the Garden Tour; if so, we will need someone to chair.

**Hospitality Coordinator** - Jan Parks passed around a food sign-up sheet for the Christmas party and stated that the club will provide two meat dishes (ham and salmon). She asked everyone to please thank the church for providing the space for our meeting today.

**Guest Speaker Dennis Swiftdeer Paige Community ECO Gardens: Landscaping with Native Plants** Dennis presented an amazing slideshow with very impressive examples of his work. He also had books, by the same name, available for sale.

**Respectfully Submitted,**  
Janet Gluskoter,  
Secretary Evergreen Garden Club



**EGC HOLIDAY PARTY IS BACK IN-PERSON  
AT THE BERGEN FIRE TRAINING CENTER  
DECEMBER 14<sup>th</sup>! 9:00 am – 11 am**

***Wear Your Christmas Sweater and your Mask!***

Wear a personally crafted,  
store bought or borrowed  
Christmas sweater to  
win a prize in multiple categories.

***Bring a Gift for a Gift Exchange Game!***

Bring a wrapped, garden related gift for a  
"White Elk Gift Exchange"

The garden related gift can be regifted,  
homemade/grown, used or purchased for < \$10.

*Please note: No guests at this meeting please.*

***Bring Crafts!***

Bring crafts you would like to sell at  
the 'Members Craft Table'  
(EGC gets 10% of proceeds)

***Bring Soup & Cornbread for Echo Foodbank!***

As in the past, EGC will be collecting donations of  
hearty soup (at least 10 grams of protein) and  
corn bread mixes for the food bank in Evergreen.

***Bring and wear your mask!***



*An important note from  
our Hospitality Chair!*

**Hey everyone - Happy Holidays!**

As you know our Holiday Party will be held at our regular meeting place the Evergreen Fire Department Training Center. Yay!! At our November meeting I passed around a sign-up sheet for food for our party. During normal years we needed to have the following dishes. 6 vegetables, 8 desserts, 6 salads, and additional items like rolls with butter and relishes. As of now I have only 5 vegetables, 5 desserts, 3 salads, 2 rolls with butter, and no relish dishes. If you did not sign up at the November meeting or attend the November meeting but will be attending the December party and can bring a dish from the above list. Please let me know.

Also, the club will be providing the main dish which is normally Ham and Salmon and I do not believe we will be changing that menu. The club will also be providing Sparkling Apple Juice, coffee, tea, and water as well as table settings.

Please note that the FTC is a mask to enter facility for all except while eating and drinking. Please also note that the Hospitality committee has cleaned all our tablecloths, utensils, etc. and the FTC building is cleaned consistently for everyone's safety.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the FTC for our annual Holiday Party and Thank You in advance for your food donations.

Best,

Jan Parks – Hospitality Chair [Parksjl54@yahoo.com](mailto:Parksjl54@yahoo.com) or 303.670.1179 (call or TXT)





**THIS IS A DIFFICULT TIME FOR MANY AND MANY EVERGREEN AREA FAMILIES ARE NOW RELYING ON ECHO. EGC HAS MADE A CASH CONTRIBUTION, HOWEVER, FOOD DONATIONS ARE STILL GREATLY APPRECIATED. PLEASE BRING HEARTY SOUPS (WITH AT LEAST 10 GRAMS OF PROTEIN) AND BOXES OF CORNBREAD TO THE DECEMBER MEETING FOR OUR ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECHO FOOD BANK. THANK YOU!!**

Believe



### THE NOVEMBER EGC PROGRAM

November brought our group together for an informative and entertaining presentation by Dennis Swiftdeer Paige, author of *Community Eco-Gardens, Landscaping with Native Plants*. The story of the reclamation of his former midwestern condo grounds and the results for the betterment of the natural environment were most inspiring. His talk drove home the ups and downs of dealing with what Nature deals out and Dennis always manages to innovate and “kneel for natives.”

His talk offered some valuable cures such as chickadee houses (they eat the spruce budworm), wren houses (because of their appetite for Japanese beetles), and an impressive mountain lion imitation (to keep the deer away). Links will be coming by email for his many useful references.



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## How to Identify Holiday Cactus Plants

Is this a Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Easter Cactus?

[How to Care for Christmas Cactus as a Houseplant Year-round \(empressofdirt.net\)](http://empressofdirt.net)

If you have a bet with a friend about the identity of a flowering holiday cactus picked up at the supermarket, you may just want to call a draw if you are arguing about whether it's a Christmas or Thanksgiving or (less likely) Easter cactus.

Why?

Because marketers use these names for an array of different plants depending on the blooming time and where you live. And the same plant can be tagged with any of those names depending on when it is sold.

For example, the same cultivar sold as a **Thanksgiving** cactus in the United States may be sold as a **Christmas** cactus in Canada. Why? Canada celebrates Thanksgiving early in October so, by the time these plants are budding and blooming in November, that holiday is long gone and the name **Christmas** makes more sense to consumers.

And this is why it is best, when possible, to spare your friendship and identify plants by their **botanical names** instead of regional common names or marketing terms. There will still be some difficult-to-ID plants and taxonomical changes and disagreements in the scientific community, but at least with botanical names we can begin to speak the same language. Just to make the puzzle complete, I've also seen holiday cactus plants tagged with the wrong botanical name, which is not surprising when mass produced for holiday shoppers.





*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*  
Christmas Cactus (US)



*Schlumbergera truncata*  
Thanksgiving Cactus (US)



*Rhipsalidopsis*  
Easter Cactus (US)

The most common tip for identifying holiday cactus is to look at the **shape of the leaves**. If distinct, it's a great clue, but again there are plenty of cultivars that will confound even an experienced keen-eyed gardener. There is more on this (below).

If the leaves are not distinct, the flowers also provide clues.

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### Observe the Blooms

*Schlumbergeras* (see below) produce similar flowers (in a range of colors) with some subtle differences including pollen colors.

*Rhipsalidopsis* (Easter Cactus) has a distinctly different flower formation than *Schlumbergeras* and rarely gets caught up in the debate.

But the good news is, no matter what it is, all of these plants need the same care (see [Holiday Cactus Care Guide here](#)).

To read this article in its entirety along with many side-stories, follow the link below to **The Empress of Dirt** Blog!

[How to Care for Christmas Cactus as a Houseplant Year-round \(empressofdirt.net\)](http://www.empressofdirt.net/how-to-care-for-christmas-cactus-as-a-houseplant-year-round/)





1 *Schlumbergera truncata* | Thanksgiving cactus (United States)  
| Christmas cactus (Canada)



### “Claw cactus” or “Crab cactus”

The quickest way to identify a Thanksgiving cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) is to check the leaves for pointy edges and note the time of year it flowers.

- This is the most common holiday cactus sold in stores due to qualities making them more convenient to mass produce, ship, and display.
- They are easy to spot due to the points on the leaf edges that may resemble **little saw blades or pointed teeth**.
- These flowers grow horizontally, have differently-shaped upper and lower sides (zygomorphic), and **yellow** pollen, which you will find located on the anther (you may want to look up a diagram).



## 2 Schlumbergera x buckleyi | Christmas cactus (United States)



- Originally a hybrid between *Schlumbergera russelliana* and *Schlumbergera truncata*, your *Schlumbergera x buckleyi* may have all scalloped leaves, or scalloped and pointed ones.
- These flowers are symmetrical, have pink pollen, and tend to grow downward.

## 3 Schlumbergera bridgesii | Christmas cactus (years ago)

Years ago, this one was considered *The Christmas Cactus*, although the *buckleyi* now seems to dominate the title. [You can read about the dispute/history here at Davesgarden.com.](#)

- This one tends to have more rounded leaves with scalloped-edges.

The *Schlumbergeras* can bloom twice a year, first between October and February, and then between March and May, with white, pink, orange, or red flowers.

#### 4 Rhipsalidopsis | Easter Cactus



### “Spring cactus”

- Besides the later flowering time, you’ll also notice the shape of the Easter Cactus flowers is quite different from Schlumbergeras.
- Look for **flat, rectangular leaves** with slightly scalloped edges, and round, upward-facing flowers.

These are sometimes also confused with **Orchid Cacti**, which are epiphyllum hybrids. *The name and identification confusion never stops!*

#### Easter Cactus Trivia

While long touted as a different genus, subgenus *Rhipsalidopsis* has recently been transferred into *Schlumbergera*, though this change has yet to be adopted by many *Cactaceae* (cactus plant family) authorities. It will be interesting to see if this change is embraced as time goes on.





The Binetti version of 'Twas the night before Christmas'  
by Marianne Binetti



Submitted

by

Cherie Luke

'Twas the week before Christmas, and all through the yard, not a gift was given, not even a card.

The tools were all hung, in the carport with care, with hopes that St. Nicholas soon would repair.

The shovel with blade all rusty and cracked, the pitchfork still shiny, but handle it lacked. When out on the lawn, (it's brown and abused) I could see poor old Santa, looking confused. No list had been left for Santa to see, no gardening gifts were under the tree.

But wait there's still time, it's not Christmas yet, and gardening gifts are the quickest to get. You can forget the silk tie, the fluffy new sweater, give something to make the garden grow better.

If she wants a gift shiny, then don't be a fool, it's not diamonds, but a sparkling new tool. If fragrance is listed you can forget French perfume, it's a pile of manure that'll make gardeners swoon.

Give crawlers, not nightgowns, the type of hose that gives water. (Anything for the kitchen is not worth the bother.)

Give a great gift that digs in the dirt, it's better than any designer brand shirt.

Now look quick at Santa, this guy's not so dumb, under his glove, he hides a green thumb. His knees are so dirty, his back how it aches, his boots stomp on slugs, (he gives them no breaks).

The guy only works winter, you can see why, the rest of the year it's a gardening high. Elves plant in spring, pull weeds merrily all summer, in fall they all harvest, but winter's a bummer.

And so Christmas gives Santa a part-time employment, 'Till spring when the blooms are his real life enjoyment.

So ask the big guy for garden gifts this year, seeds, plants and tools, Santa holds them all dear. You see malls may be crowded, vendors hawking their wares, but visit a nursery, stress-free shopping is there.

Now Santa's flown off, to the nursery he goes, and his voice fills the night with loud Hoe, Hoe, Hoe!

## GIVE THE GIFT OF LEARNING IN NATURE

By Hannah Hayes, EGC Natural Resource Chair

Looking for the silver lining in the pandemic, it's been heartening to see people seeking the outdoors. Being sent out to play seems so familiar to my generation, but perhaps new to today's children. Our planet will thrive when children learn to fall in love with Nature.

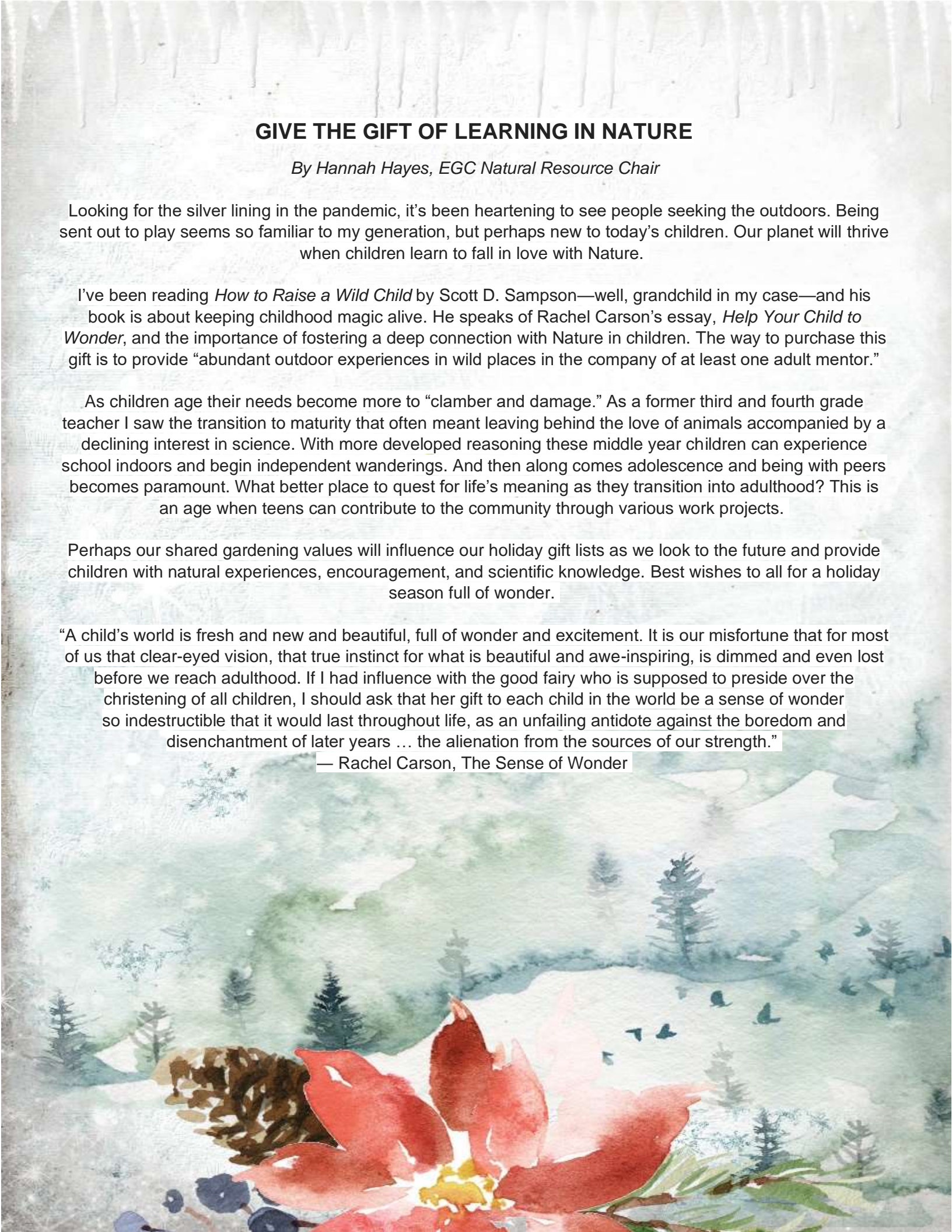
I've been reading *How to Raise a Wild Child* by Scott D. Sampson—well, grandchild in my case—and his book is about keeping childhood magic alive. He speaks of Rachel Carson's essay, *Help Your Child to Wonder*, and the importance of fostering a deep connection with Nature in children. The way to purchase this gift is to provide "abundant outdoor experiences in wild places in the company of at least one adult mentor."

As children age their needs become more to "clamber and damage." As a former third and fourth grade teacher I saw the transition to maturity that often meant leaving behind the love of animals accompanied by a declining interest in science. With more developed reasoning these middle year children can experience school indoors and begin independent wanderings. And then along comes adolescence and being with peers becomes paramount. What better place to quest for life's meaning as they transition into adulthood? This is an age when teens can contribute to the community through various work projects.

Perhaps our shared gardening values will influence our holiday gift lists as we look to the future and provide children with natural experiences, encouragement, and scientific knowledge. Best wishes to all for a holiday season full of wonder.

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years ... the alienation from the sources of our strength."

— Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*



# The Trouble With Double Flowers (Sorry, Pollinators! )

LAST UPDATED OCTOBER 3, 2021 ■ BY MELISSA J. WILL

[The Trouble With Double Flowers \(Sorry, Pollinators! \) | Empress of Dirt](#)



*T*here are many plant cultivars with double flowers including roses and peonies, but, despite their beauty, these special flowers may offer little or no pollen or nectar for pollinators. If you are choosing flowering plants to support wildlife, this is something you may want to watch out for.

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:** Melissa J. Will a.k.a. The Empress of Dirt, is from Ontario, Canada. While many plant care tips are universal, her experiences come from gardening in cold climate, four-season garden and her garden tips are mostly suited to US & Canadian zones 4-8, so many of the articles are relatable.

There are many interesting, informative and well-researched articles on her blog, along with home and garden DIY projects. To read this article in its entirety and to follow the many side-stories highlighted in green within the articles, along with a full list of resources, follow the link above to her blog and enjoy a great winter escape!

## Why Double Flowers Are a Problem

*I*f you love growing flowers like I do but also have concerns about the environment, you want your plant choices to be both beautiful and useful.

Flowers provide nectar and pollen in symbiotic relationships with pollinators, getting reproduction assistance in exchange for food. But even if a plant species is native or well-adapted to our area, we may—unknowingly—be growing plant cultivars or hybrids that are of little or no use to pollinators.

So what's the problem?

Double flowers.

Plants with "double flowers"—what we call flowers that have a lot more petals than average—can be incredibly beautiful but completely (or nearly) useless, offering little or nothing for pollinators. They are all show with little or no substance.

We see double flowers in common plants including roses, peonies, carnations, anemones, camelias, and many others.

A favorite I've had in my garden for years are double echinacea (coneflowers), bred both for their double blooms, and deep, rich jewel tones, much different than the pinks found in nature. They look magnificent, but—right nearby—the bees that devote their days to foraging on the native (straight species) coneflowers take no notice of them. They might as well be fake.

Listening to researchers in recent years, I keep hearing the same concern: the more we breed plants away from the color and formation they co-evolved with, the less attractive or valuable they may be to pollinators.

And that's a big price to pay for some extra frilly blooms.



**Double flower Echinacea (coneflower):  
So beautiful but untouched by bees.**

## HOW DOUBLE FLOWERS FORM

Nature has always produced some double flowers, which are caused by a genetic mutation. Nearly all of the double-flowered plants you'll see today are bred for this feature.

The additional petals that make up double flowers are formed from what would have been the flower's reproductive parts, situated in the middle of the flower.

These extra petals would have been the androecium (male parts) including the stamens and anthers, and the gynoecium (female parts) including the carpels or pistils. Most flowers have both sex parts, while some have one or the other as we discussed here: [Do Plants Have Sexes?](#)

But with double flowers, that space is filled with petals, making a dense, fluffy flower.

There may still be some anthers and carpels underneath the petals, but not as many, and they are inaccessible. With much lower pollen and nectar volumes, pollinators are better off using their energy elsewhere.

So, from a wildlife perspective, a double flower is of very little value. And—double whammy—double flowers typically produce fewer (if any) seeds as well.



## Single Flowers Have Problems Too

Even without double flowers to contend with, the daily life of a pollinator is not easy. The availability of good quality, easy-to-access pollen and nectar is a sliding scale and single flowers can be duds too.

Nectar production can vary day to day and even hour to hour and differs between plant species and individual plants.

If you've ever watched bees, wasps, butterflies, flies, and other pollinators forage, you start noticing all the variations. Even with nectar-rich plants, there may not be much available at that moment or perhaps buddy got there first.

We often think an animal's persistent visit to a food source indicates they "love it", but it could actually mean they are struggling to get what they need. A plant can be attractive but offer little or no nutrition. <sup>[8]</sup>

There can also be some intriguing trickery. We did a [podcast episode](#) (#318 How Flowers Communicate With Pollinators) discussing how some plants like orchids can deceive pollinators into thinking they'll be a good source of nectar, only to find nothing there.

So, foraging in general is a mixed bag, but double flowers certainly compound the problem.

## Should I Grow Double Flowers?

Assuming you want your garden to be part of the larger ecological network that sustains life, consider what your garden has to offer and how it fits in the bigger picture.

At one extreme, some advise never growing any double flowers because they hurt (or do not help) pollinators.

And, to that point, it does seem counter-productive to further waste a pollinator's time and energy when a different plant selection could do so much more.

But there are many other things in our gardens that are not great sources of nectar or pollen either and plants can serve many purposes.

Not to say this justifies the double flower choice, but, pollinators have survived for millions of years with all sorts of challenges and imperfections.

A garden exclusively dedicated to double flowers would be highly questionable from an eco-beneficial perspective. But some double flowers should not be a problem, if, overall, the garden and surrounding vicinity is thriving and diverse.

For me, I'm not giving up my few double coneflowers in a sea of diversity ([see my garden here](#)), but neither will I plant more of them.

I began gardening choosing beauty or usefulness. Now I see the beauty is the usefulness.

## Spring Flowers For Pollinators

*Y*ou know those wonderful early spring days when winter has finally surrendered—at least for the moment—and the sun is shining and the bees come out seeking nectar?

With days or weeks to go before plants like [dandelions](#) are blooming, the best nectar sources by far are early spring-flowering trees and shrubs. Just by sheer volume, they provide massive all-you-can-forage buffets that sustain pollinators.

And right there along with them are the early spring-flowering bulbs—but not just any bulbs. We're specifically looking at the ones that provide nectar and pollen.

We tend to focus on the bees but, in nature as a whole, we have so many pollinators at work. The list includes birds, moths, wasps, bats, beetles, flies, various small mammals, and more.

With so many living things depending on these mutually-beneficial relationships, it seems a shame to grow bulbs that are purely decorative when they can also contribute to the eco-system.

The list below is a good starting point. Do your homework to confirm the choices are suited to your region and feel good knowing you are growing something both beautiful and useful.

The plants suggested here are geophytes: perennial bulbs, corms, rhizomes, and tubers that store their food in underground stems or other plant organs. We use the broad term 'bulb' for all of them.

Bloom times vary from early spring onward.

If you are wanting native plants, check what is considered native in your area. Many of the bulbs listed below are non-native but still readily used by pollinators.

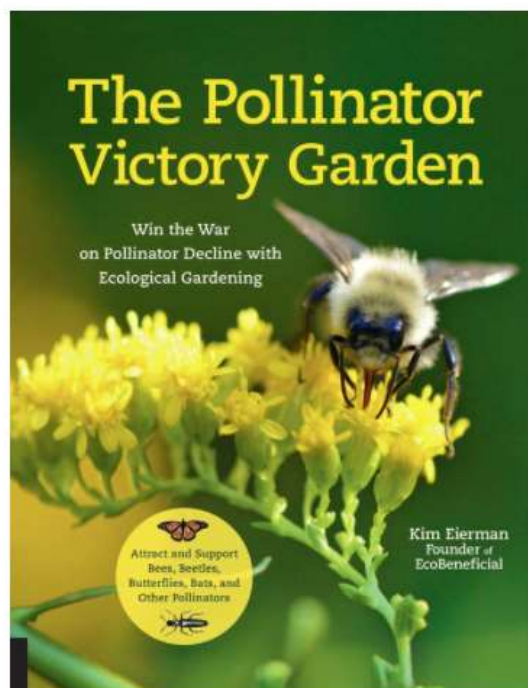
The goal is to grow pollinator-friendly flowers that are proven forage sources and will not be invasive or too aggressive in your garden.



1. **Allium** Ornamental onion (*Allium spp.*) Zones 4-9
2. **Anemone** (*Anemone spp.*) Zones 7-10
3. **Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) This is a rhizome native to parts of North America. The flowers only last for a day or two. Zones 4-8
4. **Bluebells** (*Mertensia virginica*) Also an ephemeral native to eastern North America. Zones 3-8
5. **Camassia | Quamash** (*Camassia leichtlinii*) Zones 3-9
6. **Claytonia** (*Claytonia virginica*) is a corm and its only pollinator is a tiny miner bee, the *Andrena erigeniae*. Zones 6-9
7. **Crocus** (*Crocus spp.*) Zones 3-9 | [Buy at Eden Brothers \(US\)](#)
8. **Daffodil** *Narcissus poeticus* or *N. jonquilla* Zones 3-8
9. **Dutch iris** (*Iris x hollandica*) Zones 5-10
10. **Fritillaria | Checkered lily | Crown Imperial** (*Fritillaria Meleagris*) Zones 3-10
11. **Glory-of-the-snow** (*Chionodoxa spp.*) non-native Zones 2-8
12. **Grape hyacinth** (*Muscari spp.*) Zones 3-9z (US)

13. **Hyacinth** (*Hyacinthus*) Zones 4-8 | [Buy at Eden Brothers](#)
14. ***Iris reticulata*** A bulbous perennial iris. Zones 5-9
15. **Lily-of-the-Nile** (*Agapanthus spp.*) Rhizome. Zones 6-10
16. **Siberian squill** (*Scilla sibirica*) non-native Zone 2-10
17. **Spanish bluebells** (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) Zones 3-8
18. **Snowdrops** (*Galanthus spp.*) Zones 3-9
19. **Trilliums** | A rhizomatous bulb Zones 4-7  
**White trillium** (*Trillium grandiflorum*) Pollinated by ants who carry the seeds.  
**Yellow trillium** (*Trillium luteum*)  
**Toadshade** (*Trillium sessile*)
20. **Species Tulips** (*Tulipa spp.*) – Zones 3-8  
[You can mail order a lovely variety pack here](#) from Naturehills.com. Ships to US lower 48.
21. **Trout Lily** (*Erythronium spp.*) A true bulb with several native varieties. Zones 3-9
22. **Winter Aconite or Buttercup** (*Eranthis spp.*)\* Zones 2-9
23. **Wood hyacinth** (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) Zones 3-9

For a free printable of the above bulbs, visit the website:  
[20 Spring Bulbs For Pollinators \(empressof dirt.net\)](http://empressof dirt.net)



#### [The Pollinator Victory Garden](#)

Win the War on Pollinator Decline with Ecological Gardening; Attract and Support Bees, Beetles, Butterflies, Bats, and Other Pollinators


by Kim Eierman

[See it on Amazon](#)

The passion and urgency that inspired WWI and WWII Victory Gardens is needed today to meet another threat to our food supply and our environment—the steep decline of pollinators. The Pollinator Victory Garden offers practical solutions for winning the war against the demise of these essential animals.

[Read More](#)

[Want Lots of Pollinators? Grow a Diverse Selection of Plants](#)



**IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP  
for the 2021-2022 year!**

**Please send checks to EVERGREEN GARDEN CLUB,  
PO Box 1393, Evergreen, CO 80437**

**You may also PAY ON LINE at our website:  
<https://www.evergreengardenclub.org/membership-details>**

**Personal yearly membership is \$30.00**

**Family membership is \$40.00**

**Business membership is \$60.00**



**Jefferson County Master Gardener's  
2021 Calendars are now available!**

**Calendars are \$15.00 and profits benefit  
a Colorado Horticulture Student Scholarship  
Contact Cherie Luke at [cherie7651@gmail.com](mailto:cherie7651@gmail.com)  
or Cindy Gibson at [clgibson426@gmail.com](mailto:clgibson426@gmail.com)**



**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!**

**LINDA DYER**

**ANN ROVIN**



**BEST WISHES**

**TO ALL OF OUR EGG**

**DECEMBER BIRTHDAY**

**BOYS & GIRLS!**



**BASKIN ROBBINS**

**BEAUJO'S PIZZA**

**CHOW DOWN**

**COLDWELL BANKER  
REALTOR**

**THE HOLLY BERRY**

**HEALTHFIRE BOOKS**

**NELLYBELLE GENERAL  
STORE**

**STEMS**

**STEVEN PARKS  
GOLDSMITH**

**SUNDANCE  
LANDSCAPING**

**THE EVERGREEN  
GALLERY**

**VILLAGE GOURMET**

**PRIME LENDING**

**FRAMES FOR ALL  
REASONS**

**JAVA GROOVE**



Believe

# 10 Best Christmas Plants and Flowers—Plus How to Make Them Thrive 'Til Santa Arrives

Keep your Christmas tree, plants, and flowers beautiful the whole season long.

BY ANNA OCCA SAMSONE

**A HELPFUL  
CHRISTMAS REPEAT!**

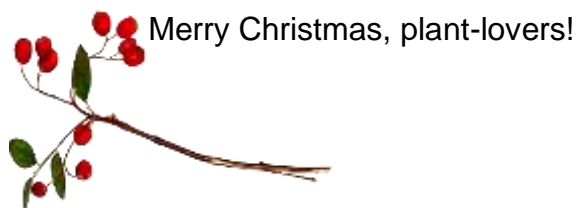


Who says winter's not gardening season? Sure, you might not be able to plant fall mums right in the middle of December, but the way we see it, greenery and flowers are even *more* necessary around the holidays, adding color, life, and cheer to your home on even the chilliest of days. Their value is often underestimated (especially when compared to more obvious holiday elements like Christmas cookies), but make no mistake: Plants are a huge, important part of holiday décor.

Here, we've rounded up the absolute best Christmas plants and flowers (think: Christmas trees, Christmas poinsettias, and even the lovely Christmas cactus) that'll keep your home feeling like a greenhouse all the way through the winter months. What's more, we've included tips on caring for them, including advice on whether to keep them or toss them after the holiday. Most of the plants we've selected here are hardy, nice to look at, and even feature Christmas-approved color combinations—which means they work wonderfully as affordable gifts for your mom, husband, neighbors, and family friends too.

Worried your plants won't make it till the end of the season? Think again: "Many holiday plants can thrive for years with the right conditions and care," says Tim Pollak, outdoor floriculturist with the Chicago Botanic Garden. Of course, just like with any garden, it's important to stay on top of your plants' watering and tending schedule—but if you do, you'll reap the beautiful, red-and-green benefits.

The good news? You've got everything you need right here—and then some—to ensure that your favorites don't end up as the Ghost of Christmas Past before the holidays even arrive.



Merry Christmas, plant-lovers!

Christmas cacti are so pretty, they just might rival the beauty of the ornaments on your tree. "These are one of the hardier holiday plants and can last for years and years," says Pollak. Different species bloom at different times of year including Thanksgiving and Easter.

#### **HOW TO CARE FOR IT**

Place in a bright window. Flower buds that drop before opening may be caused by warm temperatures or overly dry soil. Water when dry, but don't let the plant sit in water.

"They're a succulent and the pads get soft and mushy if you overwater," says Pollak. Check pot every seven to 10 days.

#### **KEEP OR TOSS?**

Keep! To get flowers to set next year, take the plant outdoors for about three weeks in late summer to early fall, bringing it indoors before temperatures dip into the mid-40s. They prefer to be pot-bound, so no need to repot for years. Fertilize monthly between April to October.

## **Christmas Cactus**



## **Cyclamen**



These cool-season plants tolerate temperatures into the 40s, which is why they're popular in the winter months. They can bloom for more than eight weeks with the right conditions.

#### **HOW TO CARE FOR IT**

Place in medium diffused, not super-bright, light. Avoid warm drafts to prolong flowering, and deadhead spent flowers and yellow leaves by pulling off the entire stem near the foliage line. Water from the base, not from the top, by setting it in a saucer of water and letting it absorb for 15 to 20 minutes, then remove the plant. Avoid splashing water on the leaves.

#### **KEEP OR TOSS?**

Toss! It's tough to get cyclamen to re-bloom.





Poinsettias are nearly as classic as Christmas movies! "Choose plants that have little yellow flowers, called cyathia, in the center of the colored leaves," says Gary Vollmer, product and technical manager with Selecta North America, a poinsettia breeder. If you chose a plant that's shedding pollen or the yellow flowers have dropped off, it's past its prime and won't last through the season.

#### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Cover your poinsettia when bringing it home, especially if temperatures are in the 20s or lower, and don't leave it in the car while you run errands. Water when dry to the touch. "The most reliable way to kill them is root rot from overwatering," says Vollmer. Remove the foil or pot cover (or poke holes in it) that's around the plant when you buy to ensure it's not sitting in water. Water sparingly, then let drain completely in the sink.

#### KEEP OR TOSS?

Your call! To promote flowering next year, place in a bright window after the holidays. After April 1, remove the colored leaves (called bracts). Shape as needed by pinching tips until early August. Feed every two weeks with a standard fertilizer. In September, move to a room where it gets only Mother Nature's light with absolutely zero artificial light after sunset. In early October, move back to your regular living area, and cross your fingers.

## Poinsettia



This plant often is sheared into a topiary or pyramidal shape to mimic a Christmas tree. Its fresh piney scent is invigorating in the middle of a dreary winter and is a savory addition to stews and roasts.

#### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Place in bright light in a south or west-facing window. The more light the better or it tends to drop leaves. Keep the soil evenly moist by checking the pot every few days. "The number one most common mistake with rosemary is underwatering," says Pollak. These plants are Mediterranean, but they don't like to dry out completely.

#### KEEP OR TOSS?

Keep! Move it outside as soon as your area is frost-free, typically sometime in May. Fertilize every few months with a slow-release pellet-type product, and let it grow naturally. You don't need to maintain the topiary or pyramidal shape unless you prefer it.

## Rosemary



These exotic-looking flowers bloom about four to six weeks after you plant the bulb. Some varieties send up the flower first before the foliage. It's the perfect winter plant—and yes, it'll keep blooming even after you take off for your winter vacation!

#### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Place in bright light, not hidden away on the coffee table where low light levels may cause it to grow floppy and topple. Turn the pot every few days to help the plant grow upright. Keep the soil evenly moist, but don't drown it.

#### KEEP OR TOSS?

Keep! Once the flowers fade, cut the stalk but keep the leaves to help replenish the nutrients in the bulb. Move outside in a shaded area when the danger of frost is past. In late summer or early fall, let the plant go dormant and place in the garage or basement. Cut off the yellowed leaves, and ignore it (no water!) until November when you begin watering and start the growing cycle again.

## Amaryllis



## Paper Whites

These often come in kits or loose bulbs with a planting medium. Pot them up and enjoy the fragrant blooms in two to three weeks. Trust us: They smell nearly as good as the gingerbread cookies in your oven!

#### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Keep them in a cool but sunny location. Locations that are too warm cause leggy growth. As soon as the flowers emerge, tie the stems to a decorative stake to prevent them from toppling over. Water regularly so that the soil stays evenly moist.

#### KEEP OR TOSS?

Toss! They're inexpensive enough to buy again next year, and they're tropical so they can't be replanted outdoors.



These delicate-looking plants are not as fragile as they appear and will bloom for months with little care, says Pollak—maybe even into the spring.

#### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Give them bright, indirect light. They generally prefer it on the cooler side indoors. Avoid sudden temperature changes, which causes buds to drop. Water once a week until water comes out the bottom of the pot (they're usually planted in a soil-less planting medium).


#### KEEP OR TOSS?

Keep! Keep in an east or west window. Feed with a specific orchid fertilizer. Water regularly but in late summer, let the leaves dry out or wrinkle a bit to trigger the plant setting new buds. Once you see a new stem, start watering again but stop fertilizing.

## Phalaenopsis Orchids



## Norfolk Pine



This long-lasting plant is native to the South Pacific so it cannot be planted outdoors in most of the country, says Pollak. With soft, Christmassy, fringed needles, it looks like a prop straight out of a Hallmark movie.

#### HOW TO CARE FOR IT


Keep it medium-bright light such as an east or west-facing window. It needs about six to eight hours of light per day. Light conditions that are too low may cause lower branches to drop. Water when dry to the touch, but don't let it dry out too much or you'll get loads of brown needles.

#### KEEP OR TOSS?

Keep! Every two years, refresh the planting medium by topdressing with new soil. It prefers to be pot-bound. You can take it outdoors in late spring if you like, but keep it shaded. Bring inside before temps drop lower than 40 degrees. Fertilize every 6 to 8 weeks with a standard fertilizer. Toss when it gets too leggy because it won't re-grow lower branches that are lost.



## Frosty Ferns



These adorable tiny fern-like plants tinged with white are a newcomer to the holiday lineup. They're increasingly available at high-end grocers and nurseries. Keep them on your dining room table or desk; just the sight of them will inspire some seriously meaningful Christmas card messages!

### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Place in low to medium light. They prefer consistent humidity, so they do well in terrariums. Keep the soil slightly moist. Use room temperature, not cold, water. Water from below by placing in a saucer of water, letting it absorb for 15 minutes, then removing the plant.

### KEEP OR TOSS?

Keep, if you're lucky. The plant is on the finicky side and often dies long before you get tired of it. No worries. Enjoy its delicate form as long as you can.



## Christmas Trees



*O Tannenbaum*, indeed! [Christmas trees](#) are the most iconic Christmas plant, and you can get them cut or potted. Whether you're cutting down your own evergreen or selecting a pre-cut spruce, pine, or fir, you'll want to check for insects and pests as well as any damage, such as broken branches.

Test the freshness of a pre-cut tree by pulling on a branch. They should be sturdy enough to hold ornaments, and the needles should be flexible and not shed. Use your other senses: Does it have a nice green (not brown) color? How does it smell? (Of course, a living tree will be fresh.) Take the height of your room into consideration, and make sure you have a way to water it.

### HOW TO CARE FOR IT

Before putting your cut Christmas tree in water, saw off about 1/4 inch from the trunk. Secure the tree in a stand that fits (don't whittle the sides to force it). Position the conifer away from heat sources, fill with water, and keep it filled. A cut Christmas tree will drink a lot in the first week. Despite tips you may have read online, experts including the [Penn State Department of Horticulture](#) agree that there's no need to feed it anything other than water.

### KEEP OR TOSS?

A cut Christmas tree generally stays fresh for a month or so when it's well cared for. After three or four weeks, when the needles become dry and brittle, it might be time to toss. If you went with a potted Christmas tree, you'll only want to display it for a week or so before transitioning it to the garage to help it acclimate to the cold, then into a hole outside, where you should keep it well-watered.

# Christmas at the Denver Botanic Gardens



Please send any corrections or submissions for  
The Wild Iris to [louiseheern@gmail.com](mailto:louiseheern@gmail.com)  
Merry Christmas and Holiday Wishes to All