



Holly is an easy way to add structure and winter color to the garden. It stays green all year, and the red berries brighten the landscape when other plants are dormant. Plant holly in part to full sun and water it well during its first year. For berries, include both a male and female plant. Once established, holly needs little care. Article by: Liz Will

The Oakland Gardener

December 2025

Monthly Plant Feature

Amaryllis: A Holiday Plant Worth Your Time

Article and Photos by: Jamiel Dado

With the holiday season firmly in place, many of us seek to decorate our surroundings in wonderfully festive ways. Whatever holiday you might find yourself celebrating, having some beautiful indoor blooms will no doubt make it merrier. Luckily, wherever you might find yourself in



December, chances are there will be a plethora of plants to choose from. It is easy to go straight for the majestic poinsettia with all its colorful red bracts, or be drawn to the Christmas cactus, kalanchoe, or cyclamen. Indeed, all of these are great options, especially since they are already in bloom when you bring them home from your local nursery, but I would implore you to give the equally exquisite amaryllis a go.

The name amaryllis comes from the **Greek word** meaning “to sparkle,” which is a stunning feature in the right light and brings a sort of magic to the season. Interestingly though, the lily-like flower that we refer to commonly as amaryllis is not only not a type of lily but isn’t even really an amaryllis! They are in fact a part of the genus **Hippeastrum** and originate in Central and South America as opposed to the true amaryllis that comes from South Africa. While a little convoluted, it’s best to just move forward and keep referring to them as amaryllis like everyone else does!

What you might notice about purchasing an amaryllis from the store is that it requires some assembly. Unlike all the other holiday plants, amaryllis is usually sold in a little kit that contains a bulb, a small pot, and a dried disk of growing medium. No worries! It is quite easy to get it **started** and is well worth the minimal effort involved. After rehydrating the growing medium, merely pot it up in the included container (or use your own) and water it in. Make sure that a third of the bulb (or its shoulders) are above the soil line. It is best to avoid directly watering the top of the bulb. Flowering usually happens with twelve weeks of planting, so it’s best to plan accordingly for when you would most like to enjoy your blooms.



If this seems like too much work for you to be bothered with amidst all your other wassailing and what not, then I have good news for you! You can easily purchase an amaryllis bulb dipped in a colorful coating of wax. These convenient variations only need to be placed in a suitably lit area of your choosing and then enjoyed. No watering needed!

If you are planning on enjoying your amaryllis for this season only, then not much needs to be done other than admiring their beautiful display, but if it you would like to keep the party going for years to come, then there are a few **steps** you will need to follow. As blooms start to fade, it is best to cut them off as to avoid any seed production. When all the blooms on a stalk have withered, you can cut the stalk down to a couple of inches from the bulb. It is important to leave the leaves intact so it can create the energy it needs for future blooms. Placing the pot in a sunny window, water when the top inch of medium is dry to the touch and fertilize monthly with a 10-10-10 water soluble fertilizer. After the last frost, you can move the pot outside into a sunny location and keep evenly moist, fertilizing every couple of weeks. Before the first frost, bring your amaryllis inside and remove the leaves. The bulb can be removed from the pot and stored in a paper bag in a cool, dark, and dry location for eight to ten weeks. At that point, it’s ready to do the whole thing over again for the next holiday season!

The Farm at Trinity Health Oakland

Article by: Pat Grayer Wilson, MSU EMG

Photos by: Pat Grayer Wilson and Maureen MacLean

Every so often I come across a gardening project that feels uniquely meaningful—one that blends horticulture with real community impact. That is exactly what I discovered when I recently visited **The Farm at Trinity Health Oakland in Pontiac**. As **MSU EMGs**, this is the kind of place where our skills can genuinely change lives.



Before I even reached The Farm entrance, I stopped a few people leaving the hospital and asked if they knew anything about it. Their faces instantly lit up. They told me about receiving fresh vegetables after medical appointments and how much it meant to their families. Their enthusiasm alone made it clear: this farm isn't just a garden—it's a lifeline.

Mission

The Farm spans 1.3 cultivated acres just outside the hospital's North entrance and is part of Trinity Health's "food is medicine" initiative. Much of the produce grown here is distributed directly to patients managing conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. Seeing vegetables grown only steps from where care is provided underscored how tightly gardening and healing can be connected.

I then met with the Farm's Operations Coordinator, **Maureen MacLean**, who greeted me with such warmth and enthusiasm. Her excitement made the mission come alive.

"Here are a few highlights", Maureen said with a smile, "though this is far from everything—there are so many beautiful aspects of The Farm worth mentioning."



Gardens, Pavilion and Shade

She first guided me to the **Cut Flower Garden**, *"we just planted about 4,000 tulip bulbs that will be stunning come springtime. We use this garden to make bouquets for patients, but we also welcome anyone—from the community or the hospital—to come and cut their own."*

From there we walked to the **Pavilion**, a welcoming structure designed to serve as a community gathering space.

Next, we visited the **Shade Garden**. *"Our goal next spring is to transform it into a true shade garden. I'm looking for dedicated MSU EMGs who love shade plants and enjoy working in this kind of environment to really take over this project."*

As we continued, Maureen motioned to the larger production area: *“this is the actual farm space.”* Listening to her describe the beds, the programs, and the partnerships, it was clear how deeply the employees, volunteers, and donors believe in this mission. The Farm today includes a wide range of **programs** with more emerging each season.



Where EMGs Can Make a Difference

The Farm welcomes volunteers of all backgrounds, but they are especially excited to involve MSU EMGs who can provide horticultural knowledge. Opportunities include:

- **Flower Garden/General Farm Work**
- **Farm Share Packing** (beginning April 2026)
- **Food Pantry Support**
- **Microgreens**
- **Spring 2026 Projects: Designing, landscaping, and maintaining the Shade Garden and Flower Garden, as well as the silver border tanks surrounding the farm.**

Please note: A background check is required to volunteer, as The Farm is located on hospital grounds.

- To volunteer: OaklandFarm@trinity-health.org
- To give: TrinityHealthMichigan.org/FarmDonate

Gardening Doesn't Have to End When It's Icy Outside

One of the most exciting discoveries was learning that The Farm operates **year-round hoop houses**. Even in the heart of Michigan winter, cool-season crops, microgreens, and seed starting continue. The hoop houses provide warm, bright places to garden—and to keep supporting the community—no matter the weather.

Farmer Kate Debs, *“We're adding compost to soil. We're also making a compost extract out of some really good biologically active compost that we spray on the soil to try and inoculate it with all the good microbes and organisms.”* Her approach highlights The Farm's commitment to building strong, living soil as the foundation for healthy crops and a resilient growing system.



Why This Farm Matters

Kelsey Monks Carry, Manager of The Farm, *“There's really nothing like what we're doing here—the way that we are merging hospital integration with food is medicine...”* That vision—practical, and compassionate—is exactly why this farm matters so deeply.

MSU EMG, **Karen Koenigbauer** echoed that impact when she shared her experience: *“Volunteering as an EMG at The Farm at Trinity Health has been a wonderful experience! My favorite activity was cutting flowers and arranging vases to be provided to patients within the hospital. The staff at The Farm are very organized and always appreciative. The sign-up*

process for volunteering is flexible and offers many time frames to suit your schedule.”

I left feeling deeply inspired—and convinced that this farm offers volunteers a meaningful way to make a lasting difference.

Gardening Tips and Tricks

Proper Disposal of Live Christmas Trees After the Holidays

Article by: Liz Will

Once the holidays pass, many people aren't sure what to do with their live Christmas tree. Because these trees don't break down well in landfills, it's helpful to choose a disposal method that's both environmentally responsible and convenient. Fortunately, there are several options that benefit the community and the garden.



Community Recycling and Mulching Programs

Many cities and townships offer Christmas tree recycling programs in early January. Trees are chipped into mulch for parks and municipal landscapes. Before dropping one off, remove all lights, ornaments, hooks, garland, tinsel, and the stand. Flocked or painted trees cannot be recycled.

Curbside Pickup Services

Some waste management companies provide curbside pickup for live trees but guidelines vary. Trees may need to be cut into shorter sections or bundled before being placed at the curb. Check your local instructions to ensure the tree is collected and processed correctly.

Composting Options

Large composting sites sometimes accept Christmas trees. These facilities grind the trees and mix them into compost piles. If this service isn't available locally, some farms or garden centers accept trees for erosion control, windbreaks, or animal enrichment.

At-Home Uses in the Garden

If recycling options are limited, a Christmas tree can still be put to good use at home.

Winter protection: Lay branches over perennial beds to moderate soil temperatures and shield plants from freeze-thaw cycles. This is especially helpful in Michigan's climate.

Wildlife cover: Stack branches loosely in a corner of the yard to create a simple, effective shelter for birds and small animals.

Mulch: If you have access to a chipper, shredded branches are useful around shrubs, pathways, and raised beds.



Trunk reuse: Cut the trunk into short sections for natural edging or allow it to dry fully for use as outdoor kindling. Avoid adding large trunk pieces to backyard compost. They break down slowly and disrupt compost balance.

Planting a Live Christmas Tree in the Landscape

Some families purchase a Christmas tree with its root ball intact. These can be planted outdoors after the holidays with proper care. Keep the tree indoors for no more than a week so it doesn't break dormancy and keep the root ball slightly moist.

When planting, dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball but no deeper. Set the tree so the top of the root ball sits slightly above the surrounding soil. Backfill with the native soil, water well, and mulch lightly. Monitor watering through the first year. With proper care, your holiday tree can become an attractive, four season interest in the landscape and a haven for wildlife.

What to Avoid

Never burn a Christmas tree indoors. The sap and resin create hot, fast flames that send sparks up the chimney and contribute to creosote buildup.

A Simple, Sustainable Tradition

With a little planning, your Christmas tree can continue to be useful long after the season ends. Whether it's recycled, composted, repurposed in the garden, or planted outdoors, there are plenty of ways to keep it out of the landfill and put it to work again in the landscape.

Gardening Deep Dive

Gift Giving Guide

Article by: Liz Will

Photo by: Michael Hession/NYT Wirecutter

The fresh snow is a timely reminder that we're starting to turn our sights to the indoors and many of us are preparing for the holiday season ahead. Here are some seeds to plant with family and friends during the giving season to ensure your gardening continues to grow.



By-pass Pruners: A good pair of hand pruners is the mainstay of any gardener, home or professional. By-pass pruners have blades that slide past one another, as opposed to anvil pruners. Anvil blades have a moving blade that cuts into a solid piece of metal. In terms of versatility, the by-pass are far superior and will provide healthy cuts to the live plant stock you're looking to shape. While not perfect for deadheading, a sharp pair of by-pass pruners will work in a

pinch. Look for quality construction, with a heavy spring to last through multiple seasons. With annual care and sharpening, this gift will serve you well throughout multiple seasons to come.

Weed Identification Manual: At first glance, this does seem to be a lump of coal. But a well-produced manual that describes the taxonomy, provides accurate identification features, and growth habit will be a book a gardener's candy cane. Learning about weeds is really no different than learning about plants we want to see in the garden. Understanding a weed's life cycle helps a gardener to break it and can help lessen weed pressure season after season. Extension services often provide these types of books as pocket guides that rest nicely in a tool carrier for on the spot identification—no cell service required!

Nursery Gift Card: Sometimes, buying just what you want saves heart-ache and disappointment—even if you aren't a teenager. While you're planning for the next year's projects, search out the place you'd like to purchase your plants. A gift card will help you purchase that gift in the spring and the gift-giver will have helped you make your vision come alive—and they didn't even have to break a sweat to make that plant grow!

Time: The hardest part of gardening in the hustle and bustle is finding the time to garden without distraction. Many of the best Mother's Day gifts to me have been those days the family found their own lunch and dinner, laundry stayed in the hamper, and the phone was left on the counter. Perhaps your family can replicate that gift in the form of a "garden coupon" so you can disappear into your garden with a clear head and a fierce focus. Even better is a gift to yourself: schedule a day now for yourself and declare it yours to do the work that brings you joy.

Wishes to you and yours during this season of thankfulness and celebration....and here's to hoping you receive a gift that makes your gardener's heart sing.

Gardening for Health and Wellness



Seasonal Superfoods: Winter Produce Boosts Your Immunity

Article and photos by: Sophia Speroff

When the days grow shorter and the temperatures drop, our gardens may look a little bare—but winter produce is quietly packed with nutrients that help keep our immune systems resilient. Seasonal eating doesn't stop in December; it simply shifts toward cool-weather crops that thrive in the cold and offer powerful health benefits. Let's look at three winter all-stars that are as good for your body as they are for your garden: cruciferous vegetables, citrus fruits, and sweet potatoes.

Cruciferous Vegetables: The Cold-Loving Powerhouses

Kale, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, and cauliflower are all part of the cruciferous family—plants that taste sweeter after a frost. These hardy greens thrive in cool temperatures and can often be harvested late into the season or even overwinter with a bit of protection.

From a nutrition standpoint, cruciferous vegetables are loaded with vitamins C, K, and folate, as well as antioxidants that help reduce inflammation. They also contain fiber, which has been shown to improve cholesterol levels and possibly lower the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Try roasting Brussels sprouts or cauliflower with olive oil and balsamic glaze or add shredded kale or cabbage to soups or stir-fry for a hearty, nutrient-rich boost. If you're still harvesting from your garden, these greens store well in a cold garage, offering fresh produce long after most crops are gone.

Citrus: Bright Flavor and Vitamin C for Dark Days

While citrus isn't grown outdoors in cold climates, it comes into peak season during the winter months—making it a welcome burst of brightness for both your plate and your immune system. Oranges, grapefruits, lemons, and clementines are all rich in vitamin C, a nutrient that helps support immune function and wound healing.

In addition to vitamin C, citrus fruits contain flavonoids, natural plant compounds that have anti-inflammatory properties and may play a role in reducing blood pressure and heart disease. For gardeners who like to grow indoors, small container citrus trees—like Meyer lemons or Calamondin oranges—can thrive near a sunny window and provide fragrance and fruit all year long.

Enjoy citrus segments in winter salads with spinach and pomegranate seeds or use fresh lemon zest to brighten roasted vegetables and fish dishes.

Sweet Potatoes: Comforting Carbs with a Nutritional Edge

Sweet potatoes bring warm color and comfort to winter meals while packing a powerful nutrition punch. They're rich in beta-carotene, a plant pigment with excellent antioxidant properties and vitamin A, which plays an essential role in maintaining a healthy immune system—your first line of defense against infection. From a gardening perspective, sweet potatoes are typically harvested before frost, but they store beautifully for months in a cool, dark place, making them a reliable winter staple. Their natural sweetness pairs perfectly with savory flavors—think roasted cubes with rosemary and garlic, or mashed sweet potatoes topped with toasted pecans.

For a lighter twist, try slicing sweet potatoes into rounds, roasting them, and using them as an appetizer with pecans or pomegranate seeds, hot honey and goat cheese—simple, colorful, and full of fiber.

Bringing It All Together

Eating with the seasons doesn't just connect us to the rhythms of nature—it ensures we're getting a rotating variety of nutrients that support our immune health year-round. Cruciferous veggies, citrus fruits, and sweet potatoes each bring something unique to the table: powerful antioxidants, essential vitamins, and natural compounds that help our bodies stay strong through the winter.

So as you plan your holiday meals and winter menus, think beyond the traditional—add some roasted Brussels sprouts, toss a citrus salad, or bake a tray of sweet potatoes. Your immune system (and your taste buds) will thank you.



Smart Gardening is MSU Extension's campaign using earth-friendly messages to help gardeners make smart choices in their own backyards. The goal is to equip gardeners with a "tool kit" of research-based knowledge to use immediately at home. Whether choosing plants, using garden chemicals, fertilizer or applying water, gardeners need to understand the long-term impacts on their communities. For more Smart Gardening information click [here](#).



Ask Extension

Call the MSU Extension Lawn and Garden Hotline at 1-888-678-3464 (Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am to noon)

Upcoming Events



The Rochester Garden Club 79th annual holiday **Gifts and Greens Market**

December 4-5-6, 2025

Location: Abiding Presence Lutheran Church
1550 Walton Blvd. Rochester Hills

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Thursday Gala
5-8pm Admission \$5
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Friday: 9am - 5pm
Saturday: 9am - 1pm
Admission \$2



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Do you love your community and want to start a school or community garden? Are you a beginning gardener looking for direction so that your school or community garden is as successful as it can be? If so, consider taking this free class! The "**Starting a School or Community Garden: Essential Steps for Success**" course offers a flexible, self-paced online learning experience. Offered by **Michigan State University Extension**, this course provides valuable guidance on launching and sustaining school or community garden projects.

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Learn about Michigan's inland lakes online from MSU Extension

Registration is now open for the award-winning **Introduction to Lakes Online** course from Michigan State University Extension! Offered once a year, this six-week self-paced introductory class is perfect for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of Michigan's inland lakes—from lakefront property owners and concerned residents, to local leaders and decision-makers.

Led by MSU Extension experts and state agency professionals, the course explores a variety of topics including lake ecology, watershed management, shoreline protection, aquatic plants, Michigan water law, and community engagement. Participants learn about these topics through video lectures, interactive activities, and lively discussion forums. Additional resources are also provided for those looking to dive deeper. The course also features biweekly “Ask-an-Expert” webinars with guest speakers from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy. A certificate of completion is awarded to those who complete the class.

Registration is open now through January 27, 2026. The cost of the course is \$115 per person. Register by January 5 for an early bird price of \$95 per person. A limited number of scholarships are available. Current individual members of the Michigan Lakes and Streams Association are eligible to receive a \$95 reimbursement upon their first successful completion of the course.

Participants also can receive continuing education credits including 16 Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Pesticide Applicator Re-Certification credits (8 commercial core and 8 aquatic) and educational hours in the MSU Extension Master Gardener, Master Citizen Planner, and Michigan Naturalist programs.

Ready to dive in? Learn more and register at www.canr.msu.edu/lakesonline.

News You Can Use



Wildflowers and native plants: What's the difference?

Lindsey Kerr, Michigan State University Extension - November 21, 2025

Updated from an original article written by Gretchen Voyle.

Many new gardeners assume that native plants and wildflowers are



Making your real Christmas tree last through the holidays

Bill Lindberg, Michigan State University Extension, and **Bert Cregg, Michigan State University Extension**, Department of Horticulture and Department of Forestry - November 21, 2025

synonymous. They buy seed packs for wildflowers and think this is the envelope for care-free, native, plants that will come back year after year. However, the term “wildflower” is not regulated. It is largely a word used for marketing and is interpreted differently by different seed companies. A packet of wildflower seeds might have a few native plant seeds, but the vast majority of wildflower seeds are from Asia or Europe. Seeds specifically labeled “native plants” should only contain seeds of plant species native to North America or, more strictly, indigenous to a specific region or state.

[Read More](#)

Updated from an original article written by Bert Cregg and Jill O'Donnell.

Nothing looks, feels or smells like the holidays quite like having a real Christmas tree in the house. However, surveys indicate that the potential mess of pine needles dropping on the floor deters would-be real tree buyers. [Michigan State University Extension](#) offers three simple steps to help keep the needles on your tree and enjoy a real Christmas tree in your home this year.

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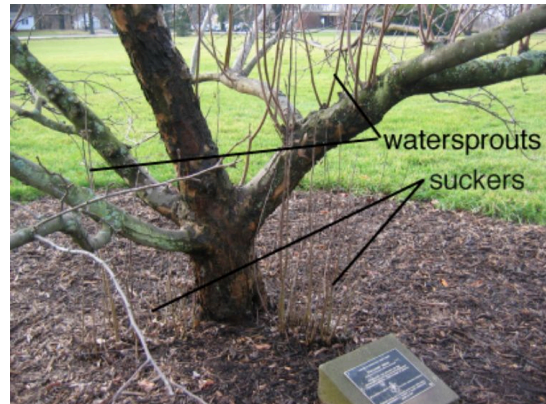


How to rebloom your poinsettia

[Barslund Judd](#), [Michigan State University Extension](#) - September 09, 2024
Updated from an original article written by Gretchen Voyle.

Poinsettias have been considered a holiday plant in the United States since the 1820s. Its botanical name is *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, and it is a member of the Euphorbia family. Like many Euphorbias, it has a white milky sap that can cause skin irritation.

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Late winter pruning of fruit

[David Lowenstein](#), [Michigan State University Extension](#) - February 08, 2023

[Michigan State University Extension](#) frequently receives questions about fruit trees and their care during the growing season. Gardeners growing fruits must recognize that actions during the off-season, when trees and shrubs are dormant, can be just as crucial.

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