



Illinois Extension

DECEMBER 2022

Connections Newsletter

The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Henry/Stark Counties

358 Front St. Galva, IL
(309) 932-3447
Tues, Wed, Thur. 8 am - 4 pm

Mercer County

910 13th St. Viola, IL
309-513-3100
Tues, Wed, Thur. 8 am - 4 pm

Rock Island County

321 W 2nd Ave. Milan, IL
(309) 756-9978
Mon-Fri 8am - 4 pm

Visit our website: extension.illinois.edu/hmrs



Wishing you the happiest of Holidays from all of us at University of Illinois Extension
Holiday Hours: Our offices will be closed from December 23, 2022- January 2, 2023

Low-maintenance, winter blooming holiday cacti are gifts that keep on giving!

Kelly Allsup, former horticulture educator, Illinois Extension

With their vibrant, floral displays and low-maintenance needs, holiday cacti are a great holiday gift. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter cactus are each different species. They bloom reliably each year without much upkeep.

Holiday cacti are easily distinguished by the stem margins as well as timing of flowering. These cacti don't have true leaves; instead, they have flattened stem segments that are used in propagation to grow new plants.

Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Jenifer Fishburn says holiday cacti are the gift that keep on giving. "They are often passed down from generation to generation as family heirlooms because they are so long-lived," Fishburn says.



Thanksgiving cactus, *Schlumbergera truncate*, has two to four saw-toothed projections resembling crab claws. Flowers are produced from late November to late December. Flower colors include white, red, lavender, salmon, orange, and yellow. "Thanksgiving cacti are often forced into bloom and sold at Christmas time, and are often misnamed Christmas cacti," Fishburn says. Christmas cactus, *Schlumbergera x buckleyi*, has scalloped or rounded stem margins. Flowers are generally showy from late December through March. The flowers form at the tips of segments.

Easter cactus, *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*, has four to six rounded teeth along the stem edges and brownish hairs at the leaf tips. Flowers in shades of pink or red flowers appear March through May. Easter cactus may re-bloom. Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti blooms are triggered by day length. They bloom when they receive 12 to 15 hours of darkness a day for five to six weeks and are exposed to cool night temperatures.

Holiday cacti are commonly used to demonstrate propagation because leaf cuttings, rather than stem cuttings, can be used to generate new plants. However, cacti do not have true leaves. The leaves are actually stems called cladophylls. Despite being a cactus, these plants are native to the tropical rain forest and are watered regularly with other houseplants. Water cacti when the top inch of soil is dry to the touch.

To gift holiday cacti, look for 4, 6, and 8-inch pots at garden centers. Find a decorative container with a hole in the bottom of the same size. Remember these cacti are long-lived and can thrive in this pot for the next 15 years. **When transporting cacti, wrap and bag plants to prevent exposure to cold temperatures as the buds will be severely damaged by time spent outside.** Holiday cacti can bloom profusely for a month or two and may even bloom twice a year. While in bloom, use cacti as decoration, keep them away from heat sources, and water regularly. As a houseplant, place in front of a window and water regularly. In the summer, these tropical houseplants can go outside in a partially shaded area. Between April and October, fertilize every four weeks with a complete houseplant fertilizer.

Manage holiday stress

Cheri Burcham, IL Extension Family Life Educator



With the anticipation of the holidays, there can also be that feeling of dread – how are you going to get everything done on an already busy schedule? For many people, the extensive preparations they engage in to pull off those picture-perfect holidays create so much stress, that they can't even enjoy themselves. The “picture-perfect” part is where much of the stress originates from. Many of us want everything to be “just right” and try to pattern our holiday plans with visions of TV specials, Norman Rockwell prints, and Martha Stewart magazine pictorials in our heads. To easily prevent part of the stress is to forget about perfection and unrealistic expectations. Acknowledge that this time of year can get very hectic, and that in real life, things won't be and don't have to be perfect. Set realistic goals for what you can accomplish. This will include the practice of saying “no” to working on certain projects or activities, delegating tasks or allowing family members to volunteer their help, and reconsidering your holiday schedule to determine which activities or traditions should be continued. If an activity is more hassle than it is enjoyable, it may not be worth doing.



In 2020, Mayo Clinic updated 10 tips on their website that help prevent holiday stress and depression. They include:

1. Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief and to express your feelings.

2. Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

3. Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to and be open to creating new ones. You may also have family members that may not be able to attend the holiday events in person, but you can still celebrate together by exchanging e-mails and texts, calling, or having a video call where everyone can visit together.

4. Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion.

5. Stick to a budget. Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend, then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Maybe try alternatives such as donating to a charity in someone's name, giving homemade gifts or starting a family gift exchange.

6. Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.

7. Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.

8. Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Remember to pace yourself on the party snacks, get plenty of sleep and regular physical activity each day.

9. Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm. Try techniques like walking at night and stargazing, listening to soothing music, getting a massage, reading a book, or meditating.

10. Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Don't forget to schedule some time for yourself after the holidays to lower stress levels and make them more manageable. And finally, always keep your sense of humor! Maintaining your sense of humor during the holidays keeps things light and puts a different perspective on situations that can come up.



Source: Mayo Clinic

Check out these FREE online workshops

Spend Less, Travel More | Get Savvy Wed Dec 7, 10 am

Travel can have different meanings for us. For some, it is relaxing on a beach after finally taking a break from everyday responsibilities; for others, it's finding a great campground/space in their favorite park. Whatever your motivation for travel, saving for your trip can be a challenge. This webinar will cover ways to develop your travel spending plan, saving tips, and suggestions for making your next adventure more financially feasible. Register at go.illinois.edu/GetSavvyWebinars



Everyday Environment: Orion and Beyond: Winter Night Sky Virtual Tour | Dec 8, 12 pm

Winter provides a beautiful, clear sky for viewing constellations, bright planets, and other interesting celestial happenings. While the constellation Orion and his belt are always a winter favorite, the red planet Mars and the Moon are the “stars” of this December’s nighttime show. Learn about the paths of the moon and Mars, take note of annual upcoming meteor showers, enjoy a constellation tour of the sky, and celebrate the winter solstice. Participants will not only gain astronomical knowledge, but also tools and resources for better sky watching all year long. Your homework beforehand: Get outside to observe Mars and the Moon from 9 to 10 p.m. on Dec 7. Register online at go.illinois.edu/WinterNightSky.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SNOW, SLEET, AND FREEZING RAIN?

Duane Friend, IL Extension Illinois Master Naturalist Coordinator and Climate Specialist

Winter precipitation is on its way. Rain, snow, sleet, and freezing rain are all potential types of precipitation. Rain is liquid water, while the other three are frozen at the end of their atmospheric journey. So, if snow, sleet, and freezing rain are all frozen water, what's the difference?

What is snow?

The first thing to know is that no matter what type of precipitation we end up with at ground level, all precipitation in the middle latitudes starts out as snow. Remember that temperatures in general decrease with elevation. Most precipitation is forming thousands of feet above ground, where the temperature is much colder than at the surface. Even in summer, snow can form in clouds. It only must fall through about 1,000 feet of above-freezing temperatures to melt, which happens easily in spring, summer, and fall.

Snow is made up of ice crystals that go directly from water vapor (gas) to solid (ice) with no liquid phase in between. Snowflakes can be considered minerals because they are solid, naturally occurring, crystalline, and non-organic. For snow to form, ice crystals condense around a tiny particle in the air such as dust, smoke, or pollen. Condensing ice crystals form a prism with facets. Branching can begin, depending on weather conditions. More facets can form on branches. Both processes can occur at the same time.

There is an infinite number of ways ice crystals can form, and you have probably heard the saying “No two snowflakes are alike,” although considering the astronomically large number of snowflakes that have occurred over Earth’s history, there may have been a few in my opinion.

Can it be too cold to snow?

You may have also heard the saying “It’s too cold to snow.” Sorry, that’s not the case. Very cold air is often close to 100% relative humidity. Since cold air can’t hold much water vapor, whatever is present is close to its maximum capacity. This makes it possible for snow to form, it’s just that the flakes will be very small. Think about the polar regions. Those areas are much colder than we get here in Illinois, but they can still get snow occasionally.

What is sleet?

Sleet is made up of ice pellets, not crystals. It also starts as snow but falls through a layer of air above freezing, where the snow melts and becomes rain. Near the ground, it travels through enough cold air to have the liquid water freeze. Sleet events typically don’t last long, as they are often associated with a nearby warm or cold frontal passage.

What is freezing rain?

Freezing rain occurs when the snow melts but doesn’t freeze before hitting Earth’s surface. It then freezes if the surface temperature is at or below freezing. Freezing rain events can last for many hours and cause widespread damage. The Easter Weekend freezing rain event in 1978 lasted several days, and some areas of Illinois were without power for almost two weeks due to the vast area of downed power lines.

The trend for warmer, wetter winters is projected to continue. This may mean less snow, but greater chances of rain and freezing rain events.

Turkey Pie Recipe



Here's an easy and tasty recipe from our Eat.Move.Save website to use with leftover turkey. You can also use rotisserie chicken, ground turkey, chicken or beef.

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cup cooked turkey, chopped
- 1/4 cup celery, diced
- 2 tablespoon onion, minced
- 3/4 cup carrots, cooked and sliced
- 1 1/2 cup frozen peas, defrosted
- 1 cup prepared low sodium turkey or chicken gravy
- 1 cup mashed potatoes, prepared

Preparation

- Wash hands with soap and water.
- Gently rub produce under cold running water before preparing ingredients. Scrub carrots with a clean vegetable brush or towel under running water.
- Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.
- Spray pie pan or shallow baking dish (8" x 8") with nonstick cooking spray. Place turkey in bottom of pan or dish.
- Mix prepared celery, onions, carrots and peas in a medium bowl. Spread vegetables on top of turkey.
- Pour gravy on top of vegetables and turkey. Spoon mashed potatoes around edge of dish.
- Bake for 20 minutes or until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees F on food thermometer.
- If cooking carrots from raw, increase total cook time to 30 minutes.

Keeping Nourished When Not Feeling Well



What do you eat when you are not feeling well? Two important recommendations for feeling better faster are rest and hydration. Rest is essential for becoming well, and drinking more liquids is the next best step. Your appetite may be less than normal, so be purposeful in what you eat. Proper nutrition is important to provide the body with the energy to fight germs.

TIPS FOR INCREASING HYDRATION WHEN SICK

- Keep water within reach.
- Sliced citrus (oranges, lemons, or limes) will add a burst of flavor and vitamin C to water. Citrus may also help you to get better quicker.
- Tired of drinking water? Add a variety of liquids such as ginger ale and other clear fluids like tea, apple juice, or any type of broth.
- Jell-O, popsicles, and frozen fruit bars will help with hydration.

SEMI-HOMEMADE NUTRITIOUS MEAL TIPS

- As your appetite returns, think shelf-stable convenience foods for a semi-homemade quick fix. Science shows warm fluids can help with congestion, and chicken soup is on the top of the list. Although homemade chicken broth tastes better, you may not feel like boiling a chicken and making the soup. Think semi-homemade, quick and easy!
- Use low sodium chicken broth in a carton, add egg noodles, a few spices, and herbs, add frozen or canned veggies and boil on the stove top for a quick, nourishing meal to feel better faster.
 - Tomato soup with whole-grain crackers and a small side salad is another healthy option.
 - Try brown rice, chicken with some favorite frozen veggies or microwave a baked potato, then top it with cheese and broccoli.
 - Build-in vegetables in all meals to help your body have the nutrition it needs to build your immunity.

NUTRIENTS TO KEEP THE IMMUNE SYSTEM STRONG

- Zinc: found in meat, poultry, breakfast cereal, almonds, yogurt, and cheddar cheese.
- Vitamin C: look to bell and chili peppers, strawberries, citrus fruit, potatoes, and dark green vegetables.

EAT.MOVE.SAVE.

Find Your Healthy Eating Style Today!
Free tips and resources for you and your family



Monthly e-newsletter
go.illinois.edu/EatMoveSave



Healthy Text Program
go.illinois.edu/HealthyText





Poinsettias

Poinsettias are the most popular plant grown during the holiday season. In fact, they are the best selling potted plant in the United States and Canada. There are more than 100 varieties of Poinsettias. In addition to the traditional red, plants are available in a wide variety of colors including pink, white, yellow, purple, and salmon.

Are Poinsettias toxic?

Contrary to popular belief, Poinsettias are not poisonous. The misconception began in 1919 when a child allegedly died after eating a leaf. This was never proven and was later determined to be hearsay, but the story has persisted. A study at Ohio State University showed that a 50-pound child would have to eat more than 1¼ pounds of poinsettia leaves, 500 to 600 leaves, to have any harmful effects.

Selection

Poinsettia displays can last for several weeks with proper care. Choose plants that have little or no pollen showing in their greenish-yellow inner flowers for long lasting plants. Poinsettias will drop their bracts and leaves once their flowers have shed all their pollen. Keep it wrapped during transport, particularly if it is cold outside. Exposure to cold temperatures can damage the plant. If properly cared for, poinsettias can retain their color for several months.

Care: Sun, Water and Temperature

Keep plants in indirect sunlight for 6 hours and make sure they are not touching windows. Poinsettias should have daytime temperatures ranging from 60°F to 70°F and nighttime temperatures around 55°F. If needed, move the plant into a cooler room during the night. Water when the soil is dry. Poinsettias often come wrapped in foil and plastic, poke holes in the bottom so water can drain out. Allowing plants to stay waterlogged can lead to root rot and premature death. It is not necessary to fertilize Poinsettias while they are in bloom.

After the Holidays

While most people dispose of their Poinsettias after they finish blooming, it is possible to get it to bloom again next year. For more information on how to care for your poinsettias after the holidays, visit our fact sheet at go.illinois.edu/Poinsettia



This winter, take your love of gardening to the next level by becoming a Master Gardener. Join our Hybrid Training in February 2023!

After completing your training, you can volunteer as a Master Gardener to serve Henry, Mercer, Rock Island & Stark counties.

Choose from a variety of volunteer opportunities that interest you such as presenting programs to clubs, civic groups, or schools; answering calls or emails for our horticulture helpline; establishing demonstration gardens that serve as educational tools; educating citizens on how to set up a community garden, designing an educational display garden or manning the information booth at the QCCA Lawn and Garden Show. **You'll also enjoy fellowship with other Master Gardeners, monthly meetings, continuing education classes and conferences, holiday parties, and more!**

The hybrid course meets online with one subject per week AND on Tuesday mornings, Feb 7 to April 18.

- Have weekly live Zoom session with your teachers on Tuesdays from 9 - 10:30 am, with ability to ask questions and engage in discussions.
- Meet with others in the training to do case study questions and activities (Tuesdays 10:30 am - Noon) including four in-person sessions.

The cost for the hybrid training is \$225. (One scholarship is available to cover tuition - see details at registration link). Register by Jan 24.

Learn more and register @go.illinois.edu/hybridMGTraining

For more information, or if you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, contact Illinois Extension horticulture program coordinator Tracy Jo Mulliken at (309) 756-9978 or email her at tmully@illinois.edu



Perfect Gift for Gardeners!

Do you know someone who wants to be a Master Gardener? Someone who has everything and LOVES to garden? Give the gift of educational training to become a Master Gardener! They can take our Winter Hybrid Master Gardener Training, February 7 - April 18, 2023.

Get details at go.illinois.edu/MGGiftCertificate

8 Dimensions of Wellness Series

January 9 to February 27

Register by Jan 6 to participate



Holistic Health: Reset for the New Year

Kristin Bogdonas, nutrition and wellness educator

University of Illinois Extension has a great opportunity to help you reset your health journey in all areas of your life for the New Year. Often, people believe their health revolves around just their physical health, such as diet and exercise; yet, there's so much more to health. Wellness is multi-dimensional, including physical, financial, emotional, social, spiritual, environmental, vocational, and intellectual dimensions. These dimensions should work in harmony to help achieve optimal health and well-being.

Join us for this holistic health reset. Each Monday from January 9 to February 27, you will receive an email with a new dimension of wellness to explore, a menu of activities to engage with, and a link to submit your completed activities. By the end of the series, you will have learned about all 8 dimensions and will have hopefully found more balance in your life. Don't worry about getting it perfect; just focus on becoming the best version of you in 2023.

Register now thru Jan 6 at: go.illinois.edu/8DimensionsHealthReset

Vocational Wellness | January 9-15

Vocational wellness, also called occupational wellness, explores ways to incorporate and express your values and interests through your work, school, and career. This dimension invites you to look at balancing work and leisure time.

Intellectual Wellness | January 16 - 22

Intellectual wellness involves many things that keep our brains active and our intellect expanding. In a broad sense, this dimension can involve looking at different perspectives of an issue and taking them into consideration. Through a number of activities—from learning about current events to organizing game nights in your home or community center—you can broaden your perspective and understand diverse points of view.

Social Wellness | January 23 - 29

Social wellness encourages us to develop a sense of connection and belonging to our community, friends, and family. It helps you perform social roles effectively and comfortably and establish a meaningful support network.

Emotional Wellness | January 30 - February 5

Emotional wellness relates to an increased awareness, expression, and acceptance of a wide range of thoughts and feelings in yourself and others. Emotional wellness involves adjusting to emotional challenges, coping with stress, and enjoying life.

8 Dimensions of Wellness continued:

Spiritual Wellness | Feb 6-12

Spiritual wellness helps us develop meaning and purpose to life. Spirituality can be represented in many ways, with or without organized religion. Becoming spiritually well means participating in activities that are consistent with our values and beliefs.

Environmental Wellness | Feb 13-19

Environmental wellness inspires us to live a lifestyle that is respectful of our surroundings and preserves the areas where we live, learn, and work. Environmental wellness promotes interaction with both nature and your personal environment. It can include occupying spaces that support our well-being.

Physical Wellness | Feb 20 - 26

Physical wellness relates to maintaining a healthy body and seeking care when needed. It involves listening to your body and adopting healthy daily habits and behaviors. Physical wellness includes eating a healthy and balanced diet, being physically active, getting adequate sleep, managing stress, getting regular medical check-ups, and abstaining from harmful behaviors. Striving for physical wellness will not only enrich your health, but will also help you maintain your quality of life.

Financial Wellness | Feb 27 - Mar 6

Financial wellness is about meeting all financial needs and feeling secure in future financial situations. Financial well-being is also a highly personal state and how we feel about this state is emotional and individualized.

BONUS: PARTICIPATION PRIZES!!

While taking charge of your health is its own benefit, Illinois Extension is going one step further. At the end of our 8 Dimensions series, once you've turned in your evaluation, we'll give you the choice of a healthy prize to help in your continued journey! A fun way to get the New Year off to a great start!

