

## Ida's Notebook



Ida Risser

It is the day before Christmas and whatever preparations haven't been made will probably not be made.

Having no particular inspiration for a Christmas column, I decided to read my December diary written 10 years ago to see how things have changed. At that time, we had young children aged four, seven and eleven to shop for and buy toy cement mixers, animal slippers, and dolls. And, the prices of gifts were much lower than now.

I read that our oldest daughter was home from a college in New York and worked part time in a grocery store. She also managed to paint all the woodwork in our living room and knit herself a heavy sweater during her vacation.

Our oldest son was working as a milk tester and had his problems. One day he forgot to get up at 4.00 a.m. to be at a farm north of Lititz by 4:30. Another time he ran out of gas and had no money with him. When he finally got to the farm, he had to wait two hours for the

farmer to come home and milk. But through it all, he managed to get top prize for his homeroom at school by decorating it with a tree he took to school; he got it by topping one of our evergreens. The last few years we've taken to buying a tree so that the children are satisfied that it isn't lopsided as our own often were.

In 1967 we had a family get-together at my sister's house and the three little first cousins all showed up in red jumpers and white blouses and looked so cute. I had baked a 14 pound smoked shoulder which I took from our smokehouse. Now there is another change—no longer do I try to keep green apple wood burning to smoke our own pork.

But some things haven't changed. I still get laryngitis from singing carols or maybe from talking too much. And, we still look forward to getting together and exchanging gifts and experiences. May all of you have a Merry Christmas!

## Plant lovers' corner

### Christmas rose brightens Winter garden

The Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) is a beautiful and unusual garden plant, noted for its habit of flowering during the dead of Winter. True to its name, you can often find it blooming right at Christmastime.

According to University of Delaware Extension garden specialist Dave Tatnall, this hardy, low-growing perennial isn't a rose at all, but a member of the buttercup family. It has attractive evergreen foliage — leaves are large, leathery, and deeply divided. And its showy white flowers with their golden centers measure two or more inches across. The blooms are produced intermittently from November until April, often appearing bravely through the snow.

You can plant Christmas roses in either early Spring or early Fall, says Tatnall. Select a protected, partly shaded spot, but put them where they can be easily seen and enjoyed while they're in bloom. Possible locations are near the front walk, patio, and entrance areas. The flowers, when cut and combined with evergreens, make beautiful indoor arrangements.

The plants need a moist, well-drained soil that's rich in organic matter. It should also be fortified with a little limestone and bone meal. Keep plants mulched year-round with wood chips, compost or similar material.

Christmas rose plants are offered by some local and mail order nurseries. Occasionally the variety *altifolius* is available — a selection supposedly having larger flowers.

### How to flower a Jade plant

Many people have never seen a Jade Plant (*Crassula argentea*) in flower. Although they are attractive as foliage plants, in flower they are exceptional. A number of points should be kept in mind if you desire blossoms on your plant. Temperature and light are the most critical. Try to duplicate their natural environment in the desert as much as possible, remembering day temperatures are high, but drop dramatically at night. A cool night temperature of 50-55° F. is especially important in initiation of flower buds on this plant. A brighter light intensity than that which will sustain this plant just for foliage is also necessary. In addition, a young juvenile plant, two to four years old, would not be sufficiently mature to produce flower buds, and a pot-bound condition seems to favor bud formation - Jade plants, in general perform better when watered and fertilized less frequently than normal and when certain pesticides, such as malathion are kept off them. This results in leaf drop.

*'tis the Season*  
Thank you for your cooperation and good will. May your Yuletide be ornamented with Health, Happiness and Prosperity!

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