

# Myths Persist About Poisonous Holiday Plants

CREAMERY (Montgomery Co.) — Some reports about poisonous holiday plants are as mythical as tales of Santa, says a Penn State horticultural specialist. "Certain holiday plants believed to be fatal if eaten are relatively harmless, while others are truly toxic," says Dr. J. Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture in Penn State's College of Agriculture. "The bottom line is that children and pets can't make the distinction between what's dangerous and what isn't. It's best to keep plants out of their reach until they learn not to put unknown substances into their mouths." Many people persist in believing that that most popular Christmas plant, the poinsettia, is extremely poisonous. "People allergic to the plant's milky sap can develop a rash if it gets on their hands," says Nuss. "But the poinsettia isn't fatal if eaten. If a child or pet accidentally eats any part of the plant, at the worst they might experience some stomach discomfort."

About 20 years ago, two Ohio State researchers fed large quanti-

ties of poinsettia parts to rats, with no ill effects in 1975, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission exonerated the poinsettia of the false charge that it is lethal if ingested.

The commission also refuted allegations that the berries of American mistletoe are fatal if eaten. "But mistletoe is not intended for human consumption and should be placed out of the reach of children," says Nuss. "Berries that fall from the sprig should be removed from the floor immediately before children and pets are tempted to eat them."

About 700 plants are known to be poisonous. Among them are these holiday plants: holly, ivy, Jerusalem cherry, laurel, rhododendron and yew. If a child or pet accidentally ingests these plants, consult a physician or veterinarian immediately. Do not induce vomiting without the advice of a doctor. If a plant containing corrosive juices has been eaten, vomiting can damage the digestive tract. The Poison Information Center for Pennsylvania is 1-800-352-7001.



## HAPPENINGS

### 4-H Horse Champion

Lisa Pannebecker, a 12-year old rider out of Sweigart's Stables in Denver, recently won the Pennsylvania State 4-H Championship at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg.

Riding in just her second 4-H tournament, she took first place in the Junior Division Saddle Seat Pleasure and Saddle Seat Equitation aboard her horse, Visions Mystic Ray.

Pannebecker has been riding for just three years, so winning is somewhat of a new experience for her. However, this is old hat for her horse. The 18-year old Ray was ridden by Brook Sweigart-Reider in 1982, when the pair won the State Junior Reserve Equitation championship. The two also won back-to-back State Senior championships in 1984 and 1985, and competed in the national 4-H event in 1986.

Pannebecker competes for the Broken Bit 4-H Club, and is the daughter of Dean and Patty Pannebecker.



Lisa Pannebecker rides Visions Mystic Ray. Photo by Preston Whitcraft, Ephrata Review.

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## Woodland News

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directly into the forest floor and eventually into streams, rivers and reservoirs.

Foresters can also build a forest that is relatively water efficient. By planting hardwood trees, which use less water than evergreens, foresters can assure that more water will leave the forest and flow to populated areas badly in need of it.

Foresters can also manage a watershed to influence the timing of water flows. For example, by harvesting trees on a south slope of a hill instead of a north slope, foresters can actually increase stream flow in the early spring and decrease flows in late summer. Sounds like hocus pocus? Well it's really quite logical. Because the sun shines brightest on south-facing slopes, removing trees there exposes the snow to direct sunlight and allows it to melt faster than it otherwise would.

Forestry and watershed management have been intertwined disciplines since as far back as 1500 B.C. when the Chinese altered their forests to regulate stream flow onto irrigated fields. Much later, in 1897, the U.S. Congress established the national forest system and cited watershed management as one of the chief purposes of managing the public forests.

Since those bygone days, forest hydrologists have advanced the discipline of watershed management considerably, using scientific research to lead the way. As a result, experts believe water supply can be greatly expanded by using more of what we know.

Now I'll add a few thoughts of my own. As you can see, a scientific basis has been established on which forestland decisions can be made. Today, however, more people are seeing the forest as more than a place to produce timber, wildlife, and water. Some groups see a need for their special interest (such as the Spotted Owl) and all the scientific data for other forest products go out the window. That's when the professional managers run into problems.

Here are a few more forestry facts for your consideration:

- 483 million acres of U.S. forestland are suitable for timber production. About 20 percent of this land is managed by the USDA Forest Service, the USDI Bureau of Land Management, and other federal agencies. About 15 percent is managed by forest industries. About 8 percent is managed by state and local governments. The remaining 57 percent is managed by nonindustrial private landowners.

- The area of forest burned by uncontrolled wildfire in the United States has been reduced from 40-50 million acres a year in the early 1930s to an average of 2-4 million acres a year.

- Total volume of wood in U.S. forests is now 25 percent greater than it was in 1952.

- There are more acres of forestland in Pennsylvania now than 30 years ago.

All of this points out that our community leaders, when thinking about planning the future of our forests and woodlands, should collect as many facts as possible about a situation before making decisions. It also points out that special interest groups may not always be pushing for the right decision for the greatest good of the greatest number of people.

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