

**All Gardens
Great & Small**
by
York Co.
Horticultural Agent
Tom Becker



Holiday Plant Safety
Myths still persist about holiday plants being poisonous. Certain holiday plants believed to be fatal if eaten are relatively harmless, while others are truly toxic.

Children and pets can't make the distinction between what's dangerous and what isn't. It's best to keep all plants out of their reach. Many people persist in believing that the most popular Christmas plant, the poinsettia, is extremely poisonous.

People who are allergic to the plant's milky sap can develop a rash if it gets on their hands. But the poinsettia isn't fatal if eaten. If children or pets eat any part of the plant, at worst they might experience some stomach discomfort.

In 1975, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission exonerated the poinsettia of the false charge that it's lethal if ingested. The commission also refuted allegations that the berries of American mistletoe

are fatal if eaten. But, that doesn't mean mistletoe berries are edible. Mistletoe should be hung out of reach of children and pets, and berries that drop should be removed from the floor immediately.

About 400 plant species in the United States are known to be poisonous. Among them are holly, ivy, Jerusalem cherry, laurel, rhododendron and yew — all commonly used in holiday decorations.

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 central Pennsylvania can be reached by calling 1-800-521-6110.

Several other holiday safety tips are important to remember. All incandescent lights give off heat. Avoid letting holiday plants dry out. Move plants away from heat sources.

Your Christmas tree's freshness depends on the type of care you provide. Delay bringing the tree indoors as long as possible. The tree should have a fresh cut across the bottom, about 1-inch above the old base. Next, place the tree in a stand with a large reservoir of water. Depending upon the size, species, and location of the tree, it may absorb a gallon of water in the first day. Check it frequently and re-water with pure tap water. As long as

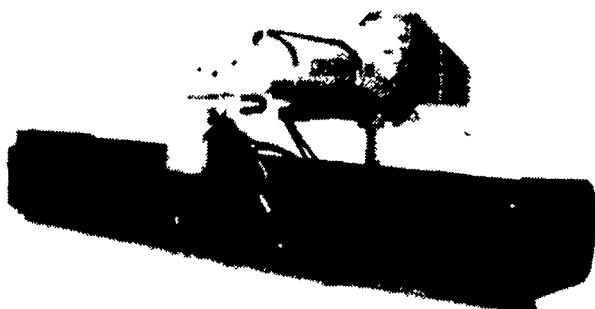
the tree is able to absorb and transpire water, it is reasonably fire resistant.

Locate your Christmas tree in a safe place, preferably near a wall or corner where it is not likely to be knocked over. Keep the tree away from heat sources like hot air ducts, wood stoves, and fireplaces. Similarly, light cords and connections used in decorating the tree should be in working condition. Lights should always be turned off at bedtime or when leaving for an extended period of time.

Any questions can be directed to Thomas S. Beiler, horticultural agent, Penn State Cooperative Extension, York County (717) 840-7408 or Email at Yorkmg@psu.edu.

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