



# Ag & Hort Update

## Shelby County Extension

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### Upcoming Events:

- **December 23 & 26- Closed for Christmas**
- **December 28- Last Day to Sign up for Master Gardner Training Sessions**
- **January 2- Closed for New Years**
- **January 5- Commercial Manure Applicator Certification**
- **January 18- Crop Advantage in Atlantic**
- **January 24- Private Pesticide Applicator Training and Crop Advantage in Carroll**
- **January 31- Private Pesticide Applicator Training and Confinement Manure Applicator Certification**

### DID YOU KNOW??

Ag and Hort News is also available online!! Each month's newsletter is posted online, and past issues are archived on our county homepage: [www.extension.iastate.edu/shelby](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/shelby). Just click on the Ag and Hort News in the county news feed and find the month you are looking for!! Best of all- online newsletters contain active links to get you to websites and publications mentioned in the articles! If you would like to receive an email when the latest issue is posted online, just email me ([kristenr@iastate.edu](mailto:kristenr@iastate.edu)) or get a hold of me at the Extension office with your email address.

### Ask the ISU Garden Expert

*Get answers to all your yard and garden questions at [www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu). For specific questions, call the Hortline at (515) 294-3108, or email [hortline@iastate.edu](mailto:hortline@iastate.edu), Monday-Friday from 10 a.m. to noon and 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.*

### **Crop Advantage**

Locations around Iowa will be hosting Crop Advantage Programs. Keynote presentations include "Goss's wilt: Get the facts!" by Alison Robertson an Iowa State University Extension plant pathologist. Goss's wilt was widespread in Iowa in 2011. Why? What options do growers have? What was the impact on yield and grain quality? With a new disease comes myth and misinformation. Get the facts before starting another growing season. The second keynote presentation will be titled "The resistance race: Where are we at?" present by Bob Hartzler or Mike Owen who are Iowa State University Extension weed specialists. The number of herbicide-resistant weed species, and the products they are resistant to, continues to expand. Growers will need to adopt new strategies, and revisit old strategies, for future weed control programs.

In addition to the keynote topics, each program features a variety of workshop topics focusing on challenges and opportunities for local producers.

For more information or to register for one of the Crop Advantage meetings contact your local extension office or visit [www.cropadvantage.org](http://www.cropadvantage.org)

### **Master Gardener**

If you have an interest in gardening and would like to volunteer in your community, consider joining the Iowa Master Gardener program. Whether you are a long-term veteran of gardening or a novice, you are welcome to join.

The program provides selected volunteers training on many aspects of gardening. In exchange for training, Master Gardeners share their time and knowledge on approved projects within their local communities. Training consists of 40 hours of Web-based broadcasting and face-to-face instruction at extension offices and on the ISU campus. After training, participants must complete a one-year Master Gardener internship consisting of 40 hours of volunteer service. Additional volunteer hours and ongoing training are required in subsequent years to maintain the Master Gardener status.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Shelby County location will be hosting a Master Gardener Training Session. Please contact the Shelby County Extension office for additional information or to sign up by December 28, 2011.

### **Commercial Manure Applicator Training Scheduled For Jan. 5, 2012**

AMES, Iowa — Commercial manure applicators can attend three hours of annual training to meet commercial manure applicator certification requirements on Thursday, Jan. 5, 2012. Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will conduct Commercial Manure Applicator training from 9 a.m. to noon at 76 locations in Iowa, and four locations in surrounding states. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. There is no fee for the workshop but applicators must register by Dec. 29 with the ISU Extension county office where they plan to attend. A complete list of workshop locations can be found in the PDF download of the brochure.

Commercial manure applicators needing to recertify and those wanting to certify for the first time should attend. All currently certified commercial manure applicator licenses will expire on March 1, 2012. Those wanting to renew must complete training requirements and submit forms and fees to the DNR prior to March 1, to avoid paying late fees.

Those unable to attend the program on Jan. 5 need to schedule time with their ISU Extension county office to watch the training DVD. Due to scheduling conflicts, many extension offices will no longer accept walk-in appointments to watch these DVDs, but do offer scheduled dates and times to provide this training. If you can't attend training during one of the scheduled reshow dates at your county extension office, you will be charged a \$10 fee to view the training at your convenience. There will not be a fee charged for scheduled training dates. If attending the workshops or watching the three-hour DVD is not convenient, commercial applicators may contact their local DNR field office to schedule an appointment to take the certification exam.

In addition to the commercial manure applicator training offered on Jan. 5, ISU Extension will also offer seven dry/solid manure workshops for commercial manure applicators in February 2012. Information regarding these workshops and locations is also contained in the link to the brochure.

If you have questions about the commercial manure applicator certification program, contact your ISU Extension county office or on the Web at: <http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/mac.html>

### **Confinement Site Manure Applicator Workshops Scheduled for 2012**

AMES, Iowa — Confinement site manure applicators and anyone interested in learning about manure issues should plan to attend a two-hour workshop offered by Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach in January or February 2012. These workshops are offered in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. There is no fee to attend the workshops, but applicators will need to pay certification fees to complete certification requirements.

"Iowa law requires confinement site manure applicators to attend two hours of continuing education each year of their three-year certification period, or take and pass an exam once

every three years,” said Angela Rieck-Hinz, ISU Extension program specialist and coordinator of the manure applicator certification program.

A total of 54 confinement site manure applicator workshops will be held in 60 different counties. In addition, a series of seven dry/solid manure applicator certification meetings will be held in February. ISU Extension county offices have a complete list of workshop dates and locations, or view a list at: [www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/certification/cofnfdates.html](http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/certification/cofnfdates.html)

The workshops serve as initial certification for those applicators that are not currently certified, recertification for those renewing licenses and continuing education for those applicators in their second or third year of their license. The certification fee is \$100 for a three-year certificate. Confinement site applicators must also pay the \$25 annual education fee. All fees are submitted to Iowa DNR.

Due to uniform certification deadlines, applicators are encouraged to attend workshops prior to March 1 to avoid being assessed a late fee of \$12.50. Those unable to attend one of the workshops need to schedule time with their ISU Extension county office to watch the training DVD. Due to scheduling conflicts, many extension offices will no longer accept walk-in appointments to watch these DVDs, but do offer scheduled dates and times to provide this training. If you can't attend training during one of the scheduled reshow dates at your county extension office, you will be charged a \$10 fee to view the training at your convenience. There will not be a fee charged for scheduled training dates and workshops. If attending the workshops or watching the two-hour training DVD is not convenient, confinement site manure applicators may contact their local DNR field office to schedule an appointment to take the certification exam to meet certification requirements.

Contact your ISU Extension county office for more information about the Manure Applicator Certification Program or visit:

<http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/mac.html>

## **Yard and Garden: Holly, Mistletoe and Poinsettia**

Sprigs of holly, mistletoe and poinsettias of many colors are favorites for holiday decorating. ISU Extension horticulturists explain what grows in Iowa, how they grow and a bit of the traditions behind these festive plants.

### ***Can hollies be successfully grown in Iowa?***

American holly (*Ilex opaca*) and English holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are prized for their glossy, green leaves and brightly colored fruit. Sprigs of both hollies are often used in wreaths, centerpieces and other Christmas decorations. Unfortunately, American and English hollies are not reliably hardy in Iowa. However, winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) and Meserve hybrid hollies (*Ilex x meserveae*) can be successfully grown in the state.

Hollies are dioecious. Dioecious plant species produce male and female flowers on separate plants. Only female holly plants produce the red, berry-like fruit. However, a male plant is required for pollination and fruit set.

While most hollies are evergreen, winterberry is deciduous (loses all of its leaves in fall). Winterberry grows 6 to 10 feet tall. The fruit on female plants turn bright red in fall and persist into winter. (Birds usually devour the fruit by mid-winter.) Excellent fruiting varieties include 'Sparkleberry,' 'Winter Red,' 'Afterglow' and 'Red Sprite.' 'Jim Dandy' is a good pollinator for 'Afterglow' and 'Red Sprite.' 'Southern Gentleman' pollinates 'Winter Red' and 'Sparkleberry.' Winterberry performs best in moist, acidic soils. Plants can be grown in partial shade to full sun. Best fruiting occurs in those areas that receive at least six hours of sun.

Meserve hybrid hollies are evergreens. 'Blue Prince,' 'Blue Princess,' 'Blue Boy' and 'Blue Girl' have dark, bluish green foliage and are often referred to as blue hollies. The female varieties

have colorful red fruit. Other attractive Meserve hybrids include China Boy® and China Girl®. Meserve hollies are variable in height. Most varieties grow 5 to 10 feet tall. They are hardy to -20 F (USDA Hardiness Zone 5). In Iowa, Meserve hollies perform best in the southern half of the state. Meserve hollies are susceptible to desiccation injury from the sun and dry winds in winter. When selecting a planting site, choose a protected location, such as on the east side of a building.

### **What is mistletoe?**

Mistletoe is a semi-parasitic plant with leathery, evergreen leaves and small, white berries. Mistletoe plants manufacture their own food, but obtain water and mineral nutrients from a host plant. Host plants include numerous deciduous and evergreen trees. Mistletoe obtains water and nutrients via root-like haustoria that grow into the host plant's water conducting tissue. Mistletoe berries are readily eaten by birds. The birds digest the pulp of the berries and excrete the seeds. The sticky seeds stick to the branches of trees. At germination, the mistletoe seedling develops haustoria that grow through the bark of the tree and into its water conducting tissue.

American mistletoe (*Phoradendron leucarpum*) can be found growing in deciduous trees from New Jersey and southern Indiana southward to Florida and Texas. (*Phoradendron* is derived from Greek and literally means "thief of the tree.") It is the state floral emblem of Oklahoma. Mistletoe sold during the holiday season is gathered in the wild. Most mistletoe is harvested in Oklahoma and Texas.

Traditions involving mistletoe date back to ancient times. Druids believed that mistletoe could bestow health and good luck. Welsh farmers associated mistletoe with fertility. A good mistletoe crop foretold a good crop the following season. Mistletoe was also thought to influence human fertility and was prescribed to individuals who had problems bearing children. It has been used in medicine, as treatment for pleurisy, gout, epilepsy, rabies and poisoning. In addition, mistletoe played

a role in a superstition concerning marriage. It was believed that kissing under the mistletoe increased the possibility of marriage in the upcoming year. Today, kissing under the mistletoe is a sign of goodwill, friendship or love.

Mistletoe should be kept out of the reach of small children and family pets, as the berries are poisonous.

### **Can you give me a brief history of the poinsettia?**

The poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is native to Mexico. In Mexico, the poinsettia is a large shrub or small tree that may reach a height of 10 to 15 feet.

Poinsettias were cultivated by the Aztecs, who called the plant Cuetlaxochitl. They used the colorful bracts to make a reddish purple dye. The poinsettia's milky sap was used to treat fevers.

After the Spanish conquest and the introduction of Christianity, poinsettias began to be used in Christian ceremonies. Franciscan priests used the poinsettia in their nativity processions.

Poinsettias were first introduced into the United States by Joel Roberts Poinsett, the United States Minister (ambassador) to Mexico from 1825 to 1829. Poinsett had plants sent to his home in Greenville, S.C. He then distributed plants to botanical gardens and horticultural friends, including John Bartram of Philadelphia.

The popularity of the poinsettia as a holiday plant grew rapidly in the latter half of the 20th century with the development of shorter, free-branching, longer-lived cultivars. Plant breeders also expanded the color range of the poinsettia. Poinsettias are now available in red, pink, white and gold. Variegated and marbled poinsettias also are available. Today, the poinsettia is the number one flowering potted plant in the United States.

## **Yard and Garden: Christmas Trees**

Buying local often times means buying locally grown food, but in December, it can also mean

buying a Christmas tree from a local grower. Christmas trees are grown in Iowa and all 50 states, including Alaska and Hawaii. More than 35 million Christmas trees are harvested each year in the U.S. Iowa State University Extension horticulturists provide tips on fresh Christmas trees.

### ***How can I determine the freshness of a cut Christmas tree?***

The freshness of cut Christmas trees can be determined with a few simple tests. Gently run your hand over a branch. The needles on a fresh tree will be pliable. Those on a dry tree will be brittle. Another test is to lift the tree by the trunk and lightly bounce the butt on the ground. Heavy needle drop indicates a dry tree. A fresh tree will drop only a few needles.

### ***What is the best way to store a cut Christmas tree?***

If you don't intend to set up the Christmas tree immediately, place the tree in a cool, sheltered location. An unheated garage or shed is often a suitable storage site. (The sun and wind will dry out trees stored outdoors.) Put the butt of the tree in a bucket of water. Remove an inch or more from the bottom of the trunk before bringing the tree in the house. A fresh cut facilitates water uptake.

### ***Should I add any material to the water to prolong the freshness of my Christmas tree?***

Do not add molasses, sugar, soft drinks, aspirin or commercial products to the water. Additives provide no real benefit. The keys to keeping a Christmas tree fresh are to place the tree away from any heat source (fireplace, heater, radiator, etc.) and keep the tree reservoir full of water. Check the tree reservoir at least once or twice a day. Fresh trees absorb large quantities of water (especially in the first few days). If the water level drops below the bottom of the trunk, water uptake will be drastically reduced or cease when the reservoir is refilled. A fresh, well-cared-for Christmas tree should be able to remain in the home for three to four weeks.

### ***There are some tiny bugs on my Christmas tree. What should I do?***

Aphids and spiders are the two most commonly found pests on fresh-cut Christmas trees. In both cases, adults that were on the trees back in late summer or fall laid eggs on the stems or needles. These eggs normally remain dormant through the inhospitable weather of winter, but they hatch when they become sufficiently warmed by heat within the house. An infestation may vary from just a few to several hundred individuals. Newly hatched insects and spiderlings are very small (approximately 1/16 inch).

None of the insects or spiders that emerge after being carried in on a fresh-cut tree will cause any harm or damage to the tree, the house, the furnishings or the occupants. They cannot bite or sting and they will not live long enough to grow or multiply. The tiny insects or spiderlings are simply an annoyance.

An application of an insecticide to fresh-cut Christmas trees is not necessary or recommended. The insects and spiders will quickly die of starvation or desiccation, whichever comes first. If newly hatched insects or spiders are found on the floor or other areas around the tree, simply vacuum them up and discard them.

### ***What are some good ways to dispose of a Christmas tree after the holidays?***

After the holidays, there are several ways to dispose of or recycle your tree (before recycling your Christmas tree, remove all lights, ornaments and tinsel).

Place the tree in the yard or garden for use by birds and other wildlife. The branches provide shelter from strong winds, snow and cold temperatures. Food can be supplied by hanging fruit slices, seed cakes, suet bags or strings of cranberries or raisins on the tree's branches. You can also smear peanut butter and seeds in pine cones and hang them in the tree.

Prune off the tree's branches and place the boughs over perennials as a winter mulch. Chip the tree and use the chipped material as a mulch around trees, shrubs or in perennial flower beds.

If you can't use the tree yourself, contact local government offices, such as the Public Works Department or your sanitation service. Most communities have some type of Christmas tree disposal program. Some have central collection points; others collect the trees at curbside.

Conservation groups may be another option. Some hunting and fishing groups collect trees and use them to provide habitat for wildlife.

## **Time to "Game Plan" for 2012**

Football and farming- two things I love- have a little bit in common. It is tough to win if we just go run plays (pick hybrids/varieties) without a plan. Same thing for farming- right now is a great time to start game planning for 2012. Seed decisions are being made right now- most preliminary orders are in, and now we can start fine-tuning them. These seed decisions are a very important part of a strong game plan- just like in football, there are a lot of choices, from conservative A-gap dives to high risk/high reward double move routes that can be "make or break" in a game- or a crop season. If we plan effectively, we have a better chance of our plays (product selections) working.

Work closely with your seed suppliers to put the right products on the right acres. What combinations of "in seed" insect and/or herbicide resistance technology do you need? What seed treatments will be the best fit for your fields? Now that we have corn nematode seed treatments available, do you consider using those? What are your tillage plans? Planting populations? Soil types? Fertility levels? Disease issues? Dry down? Maturity length? There are too many factors to list, but you get the idea- right product on the right acre.

Do you have some "perfect" fields that yield well year after year? Like 2nd and 1 from the 40 yard

line, this is a great place for "big play" offensive products with high yield potential.

Do you have some tough fields- like a 3rd and 22 from your own 20? Probably the place for conservative, more "defensive" products.

Are there some hybrids/varieties from last year that performed well, and will be around for '12 and fit your fields? Which new products fit your plans the best?

Take a look at local yield data and see how the carryover products, and the new products, performed in similar situations to yours.

There are thousands of hybrids/varieties to choose from- and no crystal ball to tell us which ones will do the best in 2012. But, with some good "game planning", the right combination of products can be put in the best position to succeed. Work closely with your seed suppliers- maybe think of them as being on your coaching staff. The great thing is that you are still the quarterback- so while your coaches may send a lot of plays (products) your way, you ultimately can make adjustments and pick the right ones.

- Clarke McGrath, Corn & Soybean Initiative Partner Program Manager/Agronomist

## **New Publication Helps Farmers Evaluate Payback and Energy Savings**

AMES, Iowa – Evaluating the energy savings of new equipment for the farm can prove challenging. A new publication from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach gives examples for comparing the payback periods of energy-related purchases.

"Estimating payback for energy efficiency," (PM 2089S), is available to download from the Extension Online Store, <https://store.extension.iastate.edu>.

"Some energy-saving investments cost more initially," said Mark Hanna, ISU Extension agricultural engineer. "Saving money today by

purchasing equipment with a lower initial cost — and higher energy demands — puts the buyer at risk when energy prices rise in the future.”

This publication addresses the concepts of initial cost, useful life and energy savings for different types of farm expenses. Examples include a lighting project, replacing an electric motor and upgrading a farm truck. Using simple payback calculations, these examples estimate the time it would take for energy savings to equal initial cost.

“During harvest, volatility in the markets may have overshadowed the fact that this year’s fuel prices are the highest we’ve seen since 2008,” said Dana Petersen, ISU Extension program coordinator with ISU Farm Energy. “It is critical to consider energy costs in your plans before you start a project or make a significant purchase for your operation.”

For more tips on energy efficiency around the farmstead, visit <http://farmenergy.exnet.iastate.edu> or follow @ISU\_Farm\_Energy on Twitter.

The Farm Energy publications are part of a series of farm energy conservation and efficiency educational materials being developed through the ISU Farm Energy Initiative. The purpose is to increase farmers’ awareness of opportunities for improving efficient use of farm energy. The initiative also will help farmers and utility providers to explore alternatives to reduce farm energy demand and to improve overall profitability in a rapidly changing energy environment.

## Forcing Amaryllis Indoors

Forcing flower bulbs indoors is an excellent way to brighten the cold, gray days of winter.

### Amaryllis

Amaryllis bulbs can be purchased pre-planted in pots or unpotted. When purchasing unpotted amaryllis bulbs, select large, solid bulbs. The largest bulbs often produce 2 flower stalks. Gardeners can choose from single-flowering, double-flowering, and miniature varieties. Flower colors include red,

pink, orange, salmon, white, and bicolors.

When planting an amaryllis bulb, select a pot which is approximately 1 to 2 inches wider than the diameter of the bulb. The container may be clay, ceramic or plastic, but should have drainage holes in the bottom. Plant the bulb in a well-drained potting soil. Add a small amount of potting soil in the bottom of the pot. Center the bulb in the middle of the pot. Then add additional potting soil, firming it around the roots and bulb. When finished potting, the upper one-half of the bulb should remain above the soil surface. Also, leave about one inch between the soil surface and the pot's rim. Then water well and place in a warm (70 to 75 degree Fahrenheit) location.

Check the pot before watering a pre-planted amaryllis bulb. If the container doesn't have drainage holes, remove the bulb and replant it in a pot with drainage holes. Water well.

After the initial watering, allow the soil to dry somewhat before watering again. Keep the soil moist, but not wet. When growth appears, move the plant to a sunny window and apply a water-soluble fertilizer ever 2 to 4 weeks.

During flower stalk elongation, turn the pot each day to keep the flower stalk growing straight. Flower stalks that lean badly will need to be staked.

Flowering usually occurs about 6 to 8 weeks after potting. When the amaryllis begins to bloom, move the plant to a slightly cooler (65 to 70 degree Fahrenheit) location that doesn't receive direct sun to prolong the life of the flowers.

Some individuals discard their amaryllis after it is done blooming. However, if given proper care, it is possible to save the amaryllis and force it to flower again next winter.

..and justice for all

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