



# Webster County Acreage Living

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## Poinsettia – The Holiday Plant

Information provided by ISUE publication, Poinsettia Care, RG316.

When selecting a Poinsettia, choose plants with large, brightly colored bracts (showy petal-like leaves) that are not wilted, broken, or damaged, and a full complement of rich, dark green leaves. Healthy leaves should be present even at the base of the plant.

Avoid plants where the true flowers (the yellowish button-like center of the bracts) are shedding pollen or falling off. Inspect the plant of insects. These uninvited guests tend to stick around. Carefully wrap plants before taking them outdoors. Brief exposures to cold temperatures can cause the leaves and bracts to drop.

Carefully unwrap plants and place them in a sunny location away from cold drafts or heat sources. Temperatures between 60 and 70°F are the best.

Check the soil daily to determine whether the plant needs water. If the soil is dry to the touch, water the plant thoroughly. Water should flow freely out the bottom of the pot. Make sure to discard the excess water otherwise the plant root systems can be damaged.

Bracts should remain attractive through the holiday season and often until Valentine's Day.



## Winter Driving Tips

Information provided by the National Safety Council and AAA.

It seems that almost everyone forgets how to drive when the snow hits. Here are 10 tips for safe winter driving.

1. Respect the winter weather. Plan extra time. What usually takes 30 minutes may take up to 45 or an hour in the winter.
2. Buckle up. Everyone should be buckled up before the vehicle moves – it is the law.
3. Don't drink and drive. You have less reaction time in hazardous conditions.
4. Winterize your vehicle's safety kit. You should include a blanket, a small shovel to dig out snow, sand to help get traction, a flashlight, a first-aid kit, jumper cables, ice scraper/brush and lock deicer.
5. Conduct a pre-trip inspection. Check the antifreeze, tires, and gas for each trip. Wipers must be in good shape to handle snow and ice.
6. Be ready for changing conditions.
7. Don't get SUV overconfidence. The bigger the vehicle, the tougher it is to stop and it may roll over if you make a turn too fast.
8. Know how to react to trouble. If you have antilock brakes, don't pump them. Press them down as hard as you can. If you start to skid, turn the steering wheel in the direction you want the front of the car to go; that will keep the vehicle from skidding out of control. Then prepare to counter steer 2 or 3 times.
9. Leave some space. Follow the 3-second rule. After the vehicle in front of you passes a stationary object, you should be able to count for 3 seconds before your vehicle passes the same object. Add 1 more second for each driving condition that deteriorates.
10. Defuse road rage. Stay calm.



## Smoking Meats for the Holidays

Information provided by the USDA

Where there's smoke, there's well-flavored meat and poultry. Listed below are some tips for safely smoking meat and poultry.

Completely thaw meat or poultry before smoking. Smoking uses low temperatures to cook the meat; the meat will take too long to thaw in the smoker. Defrosted meat also cooks more evenly.

Cook food in smokers made of materials approved for contact with meat and poultry. Don't smoke foods in makeshift containers such as galvanized steel cans or other materials not intended for cooking. Chemical residue contamination can result.

When using a charcoal-fired smoker, buy commercial charcoal briquettes or aromatic wood chips. Set the smoker in a well-lit, well-ventilated area. Follow the manufacturer's directions. Let the charcoal get red hot with gray ash – about 10 to 20 minutes depending upon the quantity. Pile the charcoal around the drip pan for smoking. Add about 15 briquettes about every hour. The most satisfactory smoke flavor is obtained by using hickory, apple, or maple wood chips. Soak the chips in water to prevent flare-ups and add about ½ cup of chips to the charcoal as desired.

To ensure meat and poultry are smoked safely, you'll need two types of thermometers: one for the food and one for the smoker. A thermometer is needed to monitor the air temperature in the smoker to be sure the heat stays between 225 and 300°F throughout the cooking process. Use a food thermometer to determine the temperature of the meat or poultry. Oven-safe thermometers can be inserted in the meat and remain there during smoking. Use an instant-read thermometer after the meat is taken out of the smoker.

Smoke food to a safe minimum internal temperature. Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops may be cooked to 145°F. All cuts of pork to 160°F. Ground beef, veal and lamb to 160°F. All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

If using sauce, apply it during the last 15 to 30 minutes of smoking to prevent excess browning or burning.

Refrigerate meat and poultry within 2 hours of removing it from a smoker. Use it within 4 days or freeze for later use.



## Candle Fires

Information provided by the US Dept. of Homeland Security and US Fire Administration National Fire Data Center

An estimated 23,600 fires in residences are caused by candles and result in 1,525 civilian injuries, 165 fatalities, and \$390 million in direct property loss annually.

Although candles are purchased and used year-round, the sale and use of candles increase during the winter holiday season. More candle fires occur during December than in any other month, and 24% of all candle fires occurs in December and January.

Data from the National Fire Incident Reporting System indicate that the majority of candle fires result from error and negligence. Candles placed too close to combustibles alone account for half of residential structure candle fires.

Candles have been a part of our lives for centuries, providing both light and decoration. Everyday use for light has been replaced; however candles are used during power outages, for religious ceremonies,

special occasions, and for decorative purposes. Common sense and caution must accompany the use of candles. Here are some recommendations to prevent candle fires:

- Burn candles inside a 1-foot circle of safety, free of anything that can ignite.
- Extinguish candles after use.
- Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.
- Use a sturdy metal, glass, or ceramic candleholder.
- Never leave a burning candle unattended.
- Trim candlewicks to ¼ inch each time before burning.
- Place burning candles at least three inches apart from one another.
- Keep burning candles away from drafts, vents, ceiling fans and air currents.
- Don't burn a candle all the way down.

## Accidental Invaders on Christmas Trees



Information provided by Laura Jesse, ISUE Entomologist

It is not uncommon to bring in some insects or spiders that were on the tree while it was growing outdoors. These “accidental invader” insect and spider pests are harmless. Plus, if you have a budding entomologist in the house, insects are best presents you can find under the tree!

The two pests commonly found on fresh-cut trees are aphids and spiders. In both cases, adults that were on the trees back in late summer or fall laid eggs on the stems or foliage. These eggs would have remained dormant through the cold weather, but you keep your house warm and they think it is spring and hatch.

These newly hatched insects and spiderlings are very small (approximately 1/16<sup>th</sup> inch). In many cases, the newly-hatched insects and spiders wander only a very short distance before drying out and dying.

None of the insects or spiders that emerge 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.

Aphids and spiders are an annoyance because of their presence. But this does not justify use of any insecticides to combat their existence. Simply pick or vacuum them up and throw them away for the only necessary “control.”

Do not spray insecticides on fresh cut Christmas trees. There is almost no benefit.

As we must remind often, there are no ticks in trees. Never. The widespread misconception that ticks live in trees appears to be deeply ingrained in the common folklore.



## Carbon Monoxide Reminders

Information provided by ISUE Carbon Monoxide Notes

- Sealing up home air leaks can be deadly. Routine maintenance like caulking the windows can disturb a home’s air pressure balance, causing deadly carbon monoxide gases to circulate through your home. Wherever you burn flammable fuel, carbon monoxide can build up. Have your cooking and heating appliances checked. Install carbon monoxide alarms.
- Flu-like symptoms could mean carbon monoxide exposure. Headaches, nausea and dizziness also are symptoms of exposure to low-level carbon monoxide.
- Have heating appliances checked every year. You can’t smell carbon monoxide, you can’t taste carbon monoxide, and you can’t see carbon monoxide. Have your chimney cleaned. Install carbon monoxide alarms in your home, the workshop, and outbuildings where you use supplemental heaters.
- A carbon monoxide detector could save your life. Give a carbon monoxide alarm as a gift this year. You could save someone’s life. See to it that you and your loved ones are protected.

## Controlling Snow Drifts



Information provided by Greg Brenneman, ISUE Ag Engineering Specialist

Snow fences are just one of the ways to control drifting snow. To make sure they do the job right, they must be properly placed.

Most snow blows through a good snow fence. Downwind of the fence, the wind slows and drops the snow. The better the snow fence, the more snow it takes from the blizzard. Research shows that the best snow fences are about half solid and half openings.

For best results, keep a 4 ft. snow fence back at least 75 ft. and preferably 120 ft. from the road or driveway you want to protect.

Some longer term solutions to drifting snow include building up roads and driveways so that snow is blown across rather than drifting on to them. Also, living snow fences of evergreens and shrubs can be planted to provide a windbreak. Make sure that they are planted back from the areas they are to protect. A good rule of thumb for Iowa is to allow 100-150 ft. for trapping of snow between the living snow fence and area to be protected.

Anywhere there is an obstruction, snow will drift. By strategically placing or removing these barriers, we can minimize problems from drifting snows.



## Staying Warm and Comfortable in Your Home

Information provided by Barb Wollan, ISUE Family Resource Mgmt. & the Iowa Energy Center

Follow these tips to stay warm and comfortable this winter:

- Open window coverings on south-facing windows to take advantage of solar heat gain. Letting the sunshine into your home can provide enough heat to reduce the load on your heating system. As soon as the sun stops shining, cover the windows to minimize heat loss.
- Cover east-, north- and west-facing windows.
- Repair damaged storm windows. Storm windows can reduce heat loss by 25 to 50%. Make sure the glass isn't cracked and that the weather stripping is in good shape.
- Wash south-facing windows. Dirt and grime on windows can reflect part of the solar heat gain you'd otherwise get from these windows.
- Trim trees and bushes in front of windows. Deciduous trees and shrubs will drop their leaves to let in sunshine. Cut back other types that block the low winter sun.
- Warm up your bed. Turn down your thermostat and add blankets, quilts or an electric blanket or mattress pad to stay toasty at night.
- Vacuum baseboard heaters, air registers or radiators. When you see dust, dirt and lint building up, clean these devices.
- Move furniture or window coverings that are blocking air registers, baseboard heaters or radiators. Make sure all the heated air you're paying for is being distributed throughout the room.
- Install radiator reflectors.



## Winter Activities for Gardeners

Information provided by the Horticulture & Home Pest News & Richard Jauron, ISU Dept. of Horticulture

A vacation in Florida, Arizona or other warm weather locations is a great way to beat the winter blues. Fortunately, there are a number of enjoyable activities to help pass the time if a tropical vacation isn't possible, such as visiting a local conservatory or greenhouse.

Two green oases in central Iowa are Reiman Gardens and Des Moines Botanical Center. Reiman Gardens is located on the Iowa State University campus in Ames and features a conservatory and butterfly house. The 5,000 square foot conservatory is filled with tropical plants, a waterfall, and seasonal plant displays that change several times a year. The 2,500 square foot Christina Reiman Butterfly Wing contains a lush, indoor garden and hundreds of native and exotic butterflies. Visit [www.reimangardens.iastate.edu](http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu) for additional information.

The Des Moines Botanical Center is located on the east bank of the Des Moines River near downtown Des Moines. The Plexiglas dome of the botanical center is 80 feet tall and 150 feet wide. The dome is home to hundreds of exotic plants from around the world. The plants share their indoor home with fish, turtles, and frogs. For additional information visit [www.desmoinesbotanicalcenter.com](http://www.desmoinesbotanicalcenter.com).

In eastern Iowa, gardeners can enjoy a stroll in the conservatory at Vander Veer Botanical Park in Davenport. It contains tropical plants and several seasonal plant displays. Another attraction in the Quad City area is the Quad City Botanical Center in Rock Island, Illinois. The 6,400 square foot conservatory contains hundreds of tropical plants, 1 14-foot waterfall, and reflecting pools.

Another enjoyable winter activity is to leaf through garden catalogs. Many contain colorful plant photographs.

Also visit a book store or public library and browse through some of their gardening books. Excellent reference books for home gardeners include: "Growing Perennials in Cold Climates" by Mike Heger and John Whitman; "Growing Shrubs and Small Trees in Cold Climates" by Nancy Rose, Don Selinger, and John Whitman; "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants" by Michael Dirr; and "Herbaceous Perennial Plants" by Allan Armitage.

Winter is also the perfect time to design that new perennial bed, vegetable garden, or select new trees and shrubs for the home landscape.



## Helping Your Pets Cope with Cold Weather

Information provided by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals

1. Keep your cat inside. Outdoors, felines can freeze, become lost or be stolen, injured or killed.
2. During the winter, outdoor cats sometimes sleep under the hoods of cars. When the motor is started, the cat can be injured or killed by the fan belt. If there are outdoor cats in your area, bang loudly on the car hood before starting the engine to give the cat a chance to escape.
3. Never let your dog off the leash on snow or ice, especially during a snowstorm—dogs can lose their scent and easily become lost.
4. Thoroughly wipe off your dog's legs and stomach when he comes in out of the sleet, snow or ice. He can ingest salt, antifreeze or other potentially dangerous chemicals while licking his paws and his paw pads may also bleed from snow or encrusted ice.
5. Never shave your dog down to the skin in winter, as a longer coat will provide more warmth. When you bathe your dog in the colder months, be sure to completely dry him before taking him out for a walk. Consider getting him a coat or sweater with a high collar or turtleneck with coverage from the base of the tail to the belly.
6. Never leave your dog or cat alone in a car during cold weather. A car can act as a refrigerator in the winter, holding in the cold and causing the animal to freeze to death.
7. Puppies do not tolerate the cold as well as adult dogs, and may be difficult to housebreak during the winter. If your puppy appears to be sensitive to the weather, you may opt to paper-train him inside. If your dog is sensitive to the cold due to age, illness or breed type, take him outdoors only to relieve himself.
8. Increase the supply of food, particularly protein, to keep your dog and his fur in tip-top shape.
9. Like coolant, antifreeze is a lethal poison for dogs and cats. Be sure to thoroughly clean up any spills from your vehicle, and consider using products that contain propylene glycol rather than ethylene glycol. Visit the [ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center](#) more information.
10. Make sure your companion animal has a warm place to sleep, off the floor and away from all drafts. A cozy dog or cat bed with a warm blanket or pillow is perfect.

### Cranberry Holiday Punch



Recipe provided by IA Substance Abuse Information Ctr.

- 2 quarts ginger ale
- 1 quart orange soda
- 8 ounces lemon-lime soda
- 2 cups cranberry juice cocktail

Make one quart of the ginger ale into ice cubes. Chill remaining soft drinks. When ready to serve, pour cranberry juice and carbonated beverages into punch bowl. Put in ginger ale ice cubes. Garnish with orange slices and mint leaves. Serves 24 punch-size cups.

### Cranberry-Pineapple Appetizer

Recipe provided by IA Substance Abuse Information Ctr.

- 2 cups unsweetened pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup raw cranberries
- Sprig of mint
- Pinch of ground clove

Put ingredients in your blender and blend for a minute or two. Serves 5.



### Drying Pine Cones

Information provided by JaneAnn Stout, ISU Applied Art Spec.

Dry pine cones outside on a flat shaded surface. If placed in the sun, some color will be bleached out. They can also be placed on a covered baking sheet and heated at 200° for 15-20 minutes. Give each cone plenty of space because the scales expand when dry. You may wish to watch this closely, so that the scales haven't over-expanded and/or become too brown. Oven drying kills any insects and also gets rid of the stickiness caused by pitch. Place the dried cones in a burlap or paper sack. Store in a dry, well-ventilated area until ready to use.

### Cheese to Please – 12 servings

Recipe provided by Communicating for Health

- 8 oz. fat-free or light cream cheese
- 1/2 cup fat-free sour cream
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 T. dried or 3 T. fresh herbs such as dill, oregano, basil, thyme and chives. Combine in food processor and refrigerate to blend flavors. Serve with an assortment of fresh vegetables, whole grain crackers or pita triangles.

## General Suggestions for All Space Heaters



Information provided by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

- Select a space heater with a guard around the flame area or the heating element.
- When selecting a heater, look for one that has been tested and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.
- Buy a heater that is the correct size for the area you want to heat. The wrong size heater could produce more pollutants and may not be an efficient use of energy.
- Read and follow the manufacturer's operating instructions. Keep the owner's manual in a convenient place to refer to when needed.
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters. Some heaters have very hot surfaces.
- Keep doors open to the rest of the house if you are using an unvented fuel-burning space heater. This helps to prevent pollutant build-up and promotes proper combustion. Even vented heaters require ventilation for proper combustion.
- Never leave a space heater on when you go to sleep or leave the area. For fuel-fired heaters, dangerous levels of carbon monoxide could accumulate or uncontrolled burning could cause a fire.
- Never use or store flammable liquids (such as gasoline) around a space heater.
- Be aware that mobile homes require specially designed heating equipment. Only electric or vented fuel-fired heaters should be used.
- Place heaters at least three feet away from objects such as bedding, furniture and drapes.

**Happy Holidays to Your Family from Ours!**

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