



Webster County Acreage Living

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One of the Most Popular Potted Flowers

Information provided by Reiman Gardens Poinsettia Care publication, RG316

Today, it is likely that at least one poinsettia can be found in nearly every household and business during the December holiday season.

Plant Selection:

- Select 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.
- Inspect for insect pests. 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.

Being able to rebloom poinsettias for several years is a great accomplishment. Use the following schedule as a reminder.

May: Cut back stems to 3-6 inches above the soil. Repot or separate if needed. Place in sunny window and water when soil is dry to touch.

June: Move plant outside. Water and fertilize more frequently as plant grows.

July 1st: First pinch.

August 15th: Second pinch.

September 1st: Bring plant indoors to sunny location at 65 to 75°F.

October: Initiate short days.



Don't Bust Your Budget on Gasoline Prices

Information provided by the Federal Trade Commission

The high price of gasoline doesn't have to bust your budget. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the American Automobile Association (AAA) offer these tips to help fuel savings at the pump.

When Gassing Up:

- Choose the right octane gas for your car. Check the owner's manual to find out what octane your engine needs.
- Avoid topping off your gas tank. In warm weather, fuel expansion can cause an overflow.

Before Heading Out:

- Keep your tires inflated to the proper level.
- Keep up with engine maintenance.

- Avoid packing items on top of the car. A loaded roof rack or carrier creates wind resistance and can decrease fuel economy by 5 percent.

While on the Road:

- Stay within posted speed limits. Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 mph. Each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph is like paying an additional \$0.10 per gallon for gas.
- Use cruise control; it helps maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, helps reduce fuel use.
- Avoid "jack-rabbit" starts and stops.
- Use overdrive gears when on the highway.
- Use air vents to circulate the air instead of air conditioning.



Drying and Storing Firewood

Information provided by ISU Extension publication "Fuelwood Production and Use", PM1291

Properly dried wood has higher heat value per pound than green wood, is easier to ignite and maintain, is less prone to throw sparks, and is less likely to promote creosote accumulation in the chimney.

Green firewood should be air dried 1 year before burning. You can increase the drying rate by cutting firewood to the desired length and splitting oversize pieces.

Locate the stack of fuelwood for air drying in an open area where there is good natural air circulation. Use a foundation to keep the first course of firewood at least 6 inches above the ground.

Stack firewood loosely to promote good air circulation. Use a roof to protect the top of the pile, or stack firewood in an open shed.

Wood will become lighter as it loses water. Firewood should be dried to 20 percent moisture content or less.

Store dry firewood outside and make sure it is under cover. Wood will pick up moisture from rain and snow unless it is protected. Avoid storing large quantities in the house, warm garage, or basement; the increased temperature may activate fungi or insects. Plan your burning so that wood that has been stored the longest is used first. Limited storage inside near the burning unit is desirable.



Winter Pet Care Tips

Information provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association

There are many different types of dangerous situations for pets during the winter season. Listed below are just a few things to look for this winter season:

Roaming Animals: Roaming cats, as well as house pets and wildlife, may climb onto vehicle engines for warmth during cold weather. Be sure to check under the hood before starting your vehicle and honk the horn to startle any animals seeking shelter inside.

Frostbite and Snow Removal Salt: Snow and salt should be removed from your pet's paws immediately. Frostbitten skin is red or gray and may slough. Apply warm, moist towels to thaw out frostbitten areas slowly until the skin appears flushed. Snow removal products should be stored out of the reach of pets as their toxicity varies considerably.

Toxic Plants and Holiday/Winter Products: The following are just a few items that are considered to be toxic to your pets:

- Poinsettia leaves & stems
- Super glue & plastic model cement & epoxy adhesives
- Snow sprays & flocked trees
- Styrofoam
- Chocolate (dark is more toxic than milk)
- Mistletoe (especially berries)
- Antifreeze
- Crayons & paints
- Tinsel

If your pet has been exposed to any of the following, remember, the earlier you seek treatment, the better for your pet!



2005 ISU Extension Garden Calendar

The 2005 ISU Garden Calendar is more than a calendar. Besides being a wall calendar, it also can serve as a garden journal with spaces for monthly notes. It's also a year-round gardening reference with lists of garden publications, a directory of garden-related help-lines, and phone numbers for all county extension offices. You can get your calendar at the Webster County Extension Office for \$8. Great stocking stuffers!



Strive for Five in 2005 Changing the Shape of our State

Information provided by Paulelda Gilbert, ISUE Field Specialist

Lighten Up Iowa is a five-month competition (01/19/05 - 06/08/05) that encourages Iowans to develop healthy activity and eating habits. Iowans are encouraged to form a team and then go the distance! Companies are encouraged to adopt this program as their wellness program and there are two programs for youth. For more information or to register visit <http://www.lightenupiaowa.org>.

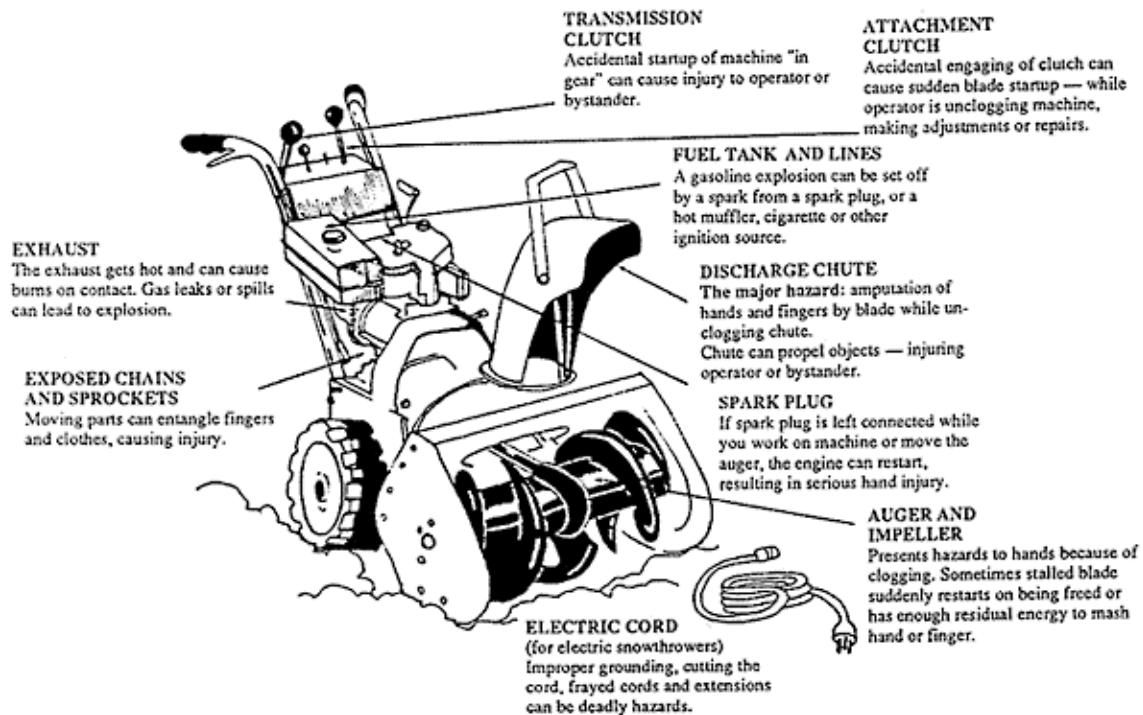
Snow Thrower or Blower Safety

Information provided by the University of Nebraska Extension Publication G949

Whirling paddles, augers and blades have tremendous power. Accidents can be prevented by practicing safety and observing the following precautions:

- Inexperience causes accidents, so review the operator's manual before use.
- Never allow children to operate the machine, and make sure adults who operate have proper instruction.
- Coming in contact with the turning blades inside the discharge chute is the most common cause of injuries.
- Accidents occur most often when the discharge chute clogs with wet, heavy snow. You can't see the whirling blades down in the chute because snow covers the blades.
- Stop the engine before cleaning foreign objects or snow from the equipment. Know how to stop the engine or the throwing unit quickly.
- The best way to prevent accidents is to avoid clogging the chute. If plugging does occur, resist the temptation to put your hand into the auger or discharge chute because the tension built up by the plug could trigger rotation upon clearing.
- Proper clothing and footwear are essential. According to university studies, there is a correlation between accidents and difficulty in moving while operating snow removal equipment. About one-fifth of the injury victims lost their footing and accidentally stuck their hands into the discharge chute while trying to steady themselves.
- Clear the area of any debris before you begin. When clearing a gravel area, don't try to remove all the snow. Set the blades about an inch above the gravel. Plan a route before you start.
- Always clear snow up and down the face of slopes, not across the face. A good rule of thumb is not to attempt to clear anything steeper than a 35 percent slope or 19.3 degrees.
- Do not exceed the snowblower's capacity.
- Shut off equipment before making repairs or mechanical adjustments.
- Clean off excess slush and lubricate the drive train prior to storage.
- Remove the key as a safeguard against unauthorized use. If the system doesn't have a key ignition, remove the spark plug wire from the plug.

Common danger spots on a snowblower. Read the operator's manual to learn to operate it safely!





Disposal of the Christmas Tree

Information provided by ISUE Publication PM654, Selection & Maintenance of Natural Christmas Trees

Disposing of a used Christmas tree often is a challenge. Several suggestions are offered:

- Place the tree in the yard as a bird haven during the remaining winter months.
- Group several trees in the yard to add greenery to the winter landscape.

- Burn the branches in small pieces in your fireplace. They will give a pleasant aroma.
- Chop up the tree and use as mulch.
- Weight with concrete block and sink in farm pond for fish habitat.



Storing Gasoline & Other Flammables

Information provided by the National Ag Safety Database

Storing gasoline and other highly flammable liquids at home is dangerous if not done properly. The location should have no electrical equipment, open flames or other sources of ignition present.

Do not store gasoline in the basement of your home or in the utility room. The furnace, water heater, clothes dryer or any of several other items could ignite fumes which may leak from the can and travel considerable distances.

If you do not have a suitable storage area, consider building a cabinet outside your house for storage or purchasing a commercially available flammable liquid storage cabinet, available from safety equipment suppliers. Never put gasoline in a container which resembles a food container. Keep gasoline and other dangerous materials locked up. These practices will prevent children from getting to the material and being accidentally poisoned.



Gift Selection for the Elderly

Information provided by the ISU Families Extension Answer Line

Gift selection for an elderly person is sometimes difficult, but with a little imagination and creativity this can be a pleasant task. Take care that your gift doesn't send an unintended message. A lovely new nightgown or comfortable pajamas might tell Grandma or Grandpa that you think she or he doesn't do anything but sleep. Some of the common stereotypes about the elderly are reflected in gifts they receive from family members.

The object is to give something that relates to the person and provides pleasure or delight. Begin by considering the elderly person's life now.

For example, springtime has many chores with which an elderly person might need assistance. Consider offering a homemade certificate for tilling or planting the garden; spring cleaning; painting or consider a gift certificate for a favorite nursery.

Gifts of food are often welcome. Pre-packaged frozen meals, personally prepared at home, are especially nice for the older person who lives alone and does little cooking. Be sure to use appropriate recipes if the elderly person's diet requires sugar-free

or sodium-free foods. You could also purchase a gift certificate to their favorite restaurant.

Another clue for gift ideas is the elderly person's past experience. If Grandma used to have a beautiful flower garden, she might enjoy a pictorial book about floral gardens. Making a memorabilia board displaying past family events or making a family scrap book is sure to be a big hit.

Consider a subscription to a magazine. Even though Grandpa no longer golfs or farms, he might still enjoy reading about these activities.

For the elderly person who remains active, or for one who needs to regain physical activity, consider a membership in a local health spa. Many have programs designed especially for the older person. Water exercises, a whirlpool or hot tub are appropriate for many.

Once you start thinking of your friend or relative as just a person, rather than an elderly person, the selection of gifts becomes easier.



Common Candy Making Problems

Information provided the ISU Families Extension Answer Line, 1-800-262-3804

- **Sugary or Grainy.** *Problems:* overcooking or beating too soon or scraping pan too much or too little beating. *Remedies:* kneading with hands the warmth will dissolve sugar or add more liquid and re-cook to final temperature.
- **Too Thin, Soft, or Chewy.** *Problems:* undercooking. *Remedy:* Add more liquid and re-cook.
- **Almond Bark or Chocolate: Starts to Melt, Then Thickens.** *Problems:* water or other alien ingredient was added to mixture or too high a heat was used on product or the product is old and the oil has dissipated. *Remedy:* If it has hardened, try drizzling in oil until right consistency has been reached.
- **Divinity too Soft.** *Problems:* syrup not cooked long enough or egg whites too stiff. *Remedy:* None.
- **Peanut Brittle.** *Problems:* if it is hard, it has been overcooked or if it is chewy, it has been undercooked.
- **Caramels Hard.** *Problems:* caused by cooking at too high temperature or cooled too rapidly. *Remedy:* None. Best to chop up and use as topping for cake or ice cream.
- **Storage.** Store like kinds of candy by themselves.
- **Freezer Storage.** Package in freezer wrap containers. Thaw in wrappings at room temperature.



Gifts from Your Kitchen

Information provided by Paulelda Gilbert, ISUE Nutrition & Health Field Specialist

Homemade gifts are a great idea any time of the year especially during the holiday season. When it comes to holiday gift-giving, it really IS the thought that counts most. Investing your own creativity, time and effort can result in the most meaningful gifts of all.

Cocoa Mix

Ingredients: 4 cups instant dry milk; ¾ to 1 cup cocoa; ¾ to 1 cup sugar; and ½ teaspoon salt.

Directions:

Measure all ingredients carefully. The amount of cocoa and sugar you use depends on your own taste. If you like a rich cocoa flavor to sweet taste uses the 1 cup measure. If you like a milder cocoa flavor or not too sweet taste uses ¾ cup measure. Mix ingredients together in clean container. Put the lid on the container. Store at room temperature. Makes 10-12 servings.

Instructions to give with gift:

Stir mix. Use ½ cup of mix for each cup of water. Place mix and small amount of water in saucepan, stir until all lumps disappear. Add rest of water and heat to just under boiling. Serve. May top with marshmallows or whip cream and sprinkles.

Slice & Bake Chocolate Chip Cookies

No, this recipe is not especially nutritious. But it IS a helpful gift for someone whose kitchen skills or time are limited. It is also great for people who live alone and only want to bake a few cookies, instead a whole batch.

Ingredients: 2 cups butter or margarine; 1-1/3 cup granulated sugar; 1-2/3 cup packed brown sugar; 1 tablespoon vanilla; 4 eggs; 5-1/2 cup all-purpose flour; 2 teaspoon salt; 2 teaspoon baking soda; 2 cup semisweet chocolate chips; and 1 cup chopped nuts (optional).

Directions:

Cut four 14"x12" pieces of waxed paper or plastic wrap and set aside. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugars. Beat in vanilla and eggs until light and fluffy. In a separate bowl, combine flour, salt and baking soda. Gradually stir flour mixture into egg mixture until blended. Stir in chocolate chips and nuts. Divide dough into 4 equal pieces. Shape each piece into an 8 to 10 inch roll. Wrap each roll in piece of waxed paper or plastic wrap. Place wrapped rolls in a plastic freezer container with a tight-fitting lid, or wrap airtight in a 14'x12' piece of heavy foil. Label with date and contents. Store in freezer. Use within 6 months. Makes 4 rolls of dough or about 12 dozen cookies.

Instructions to give with gift:

Keep frozen until ready to bake. To bake, preheat oven to 350°. Cut frozen dough into 1-inch thick slices. Cut each slice into 4 equal parts. Arrange cut pieces on an ungreased baking sheet about 1-1/2 inches apart. Bake 10 minutes, until lightly browned around edges. Remove cookies from baking sheets. Cool on wire racks or paper towels. One roll makes about 36 cookies.

The new updated Webster Co. Extension Web-site will allow you to access information from ISU Extension and Webster County 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The **Home** page welcomes you and lists the current news and events that are happening at Webster Co. Extension.

The **About Us** has our 2004 Stakeholder's Report and a list a several newsletters that we offer.

The **Staff** page lists the office staff along with all the area field specialists that serve our area. When you click on a staff person's name it will direct you to page that describes what that person's specialty and location.

The **News** page lists all the timely news articles.

The **Events** page lists all the events we are involved with.

The **Contact Information** page lists our mailing address, phone, Fax; E-mail info; and directions to our office.

The Home page also lists topic based pages. The ten client-centered topics are:

- **Communities & Business:** (Current communities & business info; staff listing; resources from ISUE; and Webster Co. Area, Fort Dodge, and State resources.)
- **Crops:** (Current crop info.; a list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; publications; newsletters; ag statistics; weather info.; pesticide info.; and useful links.)

- **Environment:** (Current environment information; list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; and interesting links.)
- **Farm Management:** (Current farm management information; list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; publications; leasing forms; ag statistics; and business info.)
- **Finances:** (Current finances information; staff listing; resources from ISUE; newsletters; helpful resources; and credit report info.)
- **Health & Nutrition:** (Current health & nutrition info; staff listing; resources from ISUE; publications; recipe resources; and health resources.)
- **Home & Family:** (Current home & family info; list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; newsletters; and family resources.)
- **Kids & Teens:** (Current kids & teens/4-H info.; list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; Webster Co. 4-H Club resources; club meeting minutes; 4-H pictures; and other youth links.)
- **Livestock:** (Current livestock info; list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; newsletters; and livestock resources.)
- **Yard & Garden:** (Current yard & garden info.; list of events; staff listing; resources from ISUE; newsletters; Master Gardener info.; and horticulture links.)

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