

# Garden Thyme



Monthly Newsletter of the East Central Alabama Master Gardeners Association

December, 2014

## Musings from Jack ...

Hello Master Gardeners..... First things first – Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I hope everybody and their families stay healthy. Maybe Ann, Vickie and Almeta can rest a bit.

The fella that predicted all the cold in the southeast last year says he expects more of the same this winter. Don't forget to cover your plants or bring them inside if that's what they need. And that inch of water a week that everything requires applies year round! Dormant season only means you get a little breather.

May be lime time – may be soil test time.

Water is not guaranteed. A water catchment system on a small shed can keep water on hand when and where it's needed. The rain barrel at the Smart Yard has done well. Gary has a good source for barrels and a work day would put one together. Our members have enough experience to find a solution to any problem.

Fruit and nut trees may need attention. If you have trees coming in to plant and need a hand, just let us know.

Keep notes on what you do that works and what could have been better and tell us.

Endeavor to persevere.

*And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.*

*Genesis 1:12*

*Jack*



## Newly Elected Officers for 2015

President – Jack Bolen  
[sheilabolen@hotmail.com](mailto:sheilabolen@hotmail.com)

256-354-2188

Vice-President - Linda Barnes  
[kenbarnes01@yahoo.com](mailto:kenbarnes01@yahoo.com)

256-363-3014

Treasurer - Martha Burnett  
[skeeter.burnett@yahoo.com](mailto:skeeter.burnett@yahoo.com)

770-778-6977

Secretary – Sheila Bolen  
[sheilabolen@Hotmail.com](mailto:sheilabolen@Hotmail.com)

256-354-2188

Please contact any of the officers if you have any ideas, suggestions, projects or concerns, or if you need help with your garden(s). Remember our Garden Friends Program!

Know of anybody interested in becoming a Master Gardener? We'd like to have a new class starting in January-February time frame.

Applications are being accepted now in the Randolph County Extension Office for the 2015 East Central Master Gardener Volunteer Intern Class!

1 Main St, Wedowee, AL 36278  
(256) 357-2841

Have any questions about the Master Gardener Program, class details or volunteering, give Dani Carroll, Regional Extension Agent, a call - 256 458 6043.

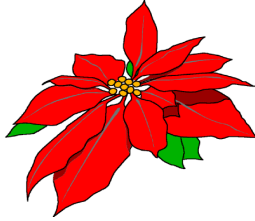
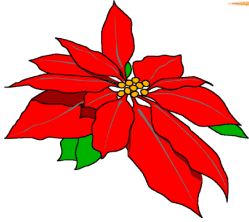
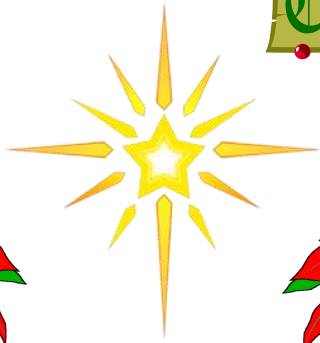
## 2015 TENTATIVE MEETING SCHEDULE

January 19 <sup>th</sup>	February 16 <sup>th</sup>
March 16 <sup>th</sup>	April 20 <sup>th</sup>
May 18 <sup>th</sup>	June 15 <sup>th</sup>
July 20 <sup>th</sup>	August 17 <sup>th</sup>
September 21 <sup>st</sup>	October 19 <sup>th</sup>
	November 16 <sup>th</sup>

**DECEMBER**



**Merry  
Christmas**



## *Poinsettia Fun Facts*

1. Did you know that the poinsettia's main attraction is not its flowers, but its leaves? The flowers of the plant are the yellow, clustered buds in the center. The colored leafy parts are actually bracts or modified leaves. Red is the most popular color, accounting for roughly three-quarters of all sales nationwide, followed by white and pink. Poinsettias range in color from red, salmon, or apricot, yellow, cream, and white. There are unusual speckled or marbled varieties like "Jingle Bells" and "Candy Cane" with several colors blended together. New varieties are introduced every year.

2. How many poinsettias do you think are sold in a year? Would you believe that more than 65 million were sold nationwide in 2011? In economic terms, that's \$237 million out of a total of \$781 million in sales of all flowering potted plants! Although every state in the United States grows poinsettias commercially, California is the top producer with about 27 million pots grown, followed by Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, and Michigan, each with about 14 million pots.

3. Did you know that the poinsettia can reach heights of 12 feet with leaves measuring six to eight inches across? It is actually a small tropical tree belonging to the Euphorbia plant family. Its botanical name is *Euphorbia pulcherrima*. A native of southern Mexico, the poinsettia blooms in December and has been used in that country to decorate churches for centuries. In the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, the Aztecs used the poinsettia leaves to dye fabric for clothing and the sap for medicinal purposes, including helping control fevers. They also considered the red color a symbol of purity, and so poinsettias were traditionally part of religious ceremonies

4. Who brought this flower to the US? Dr. Joel Roberts Poinsett, an amateur botanist and first United States ambassador to Mexico, introduced the plant that became known as the poinsettia to this country. Poinsett continued to study and breed this plant in his greenhouse, sharing plants with his horticulturist friends. It soon gained acceptance as a holiday plant, despite its very short bloom time..

## **DECEMBER CELEBRATIONS**

### **BIRTHDAYS**

Darren Hammond – 12/11

Kesa Johnston Dunn - 12/11

Wyoleen Sikes – 12/16

Toni Gay – 12/18

Sara Drummond – 12/19

Troy Smith / 12/27

### **ANNIVERSARIES**

Sharon and Bernie McKeone – 12/6

Charlie and Almata Partin – 12/21

John and Betty Terrano – 12/30

In the 1960s, researchers were able to successfully breed plants to bloom more than just a few days

5. Did you know that we have a national observance day to honor Poinsett? December 12th is National Poinsettia Day. Believe it or not, the United States has observed this official day since the mid-1800s. It honors the man and the plant that started a new industry. Poinsett died Dec.12, 1851.

6. True or False? The poinsettia is a poisonous plant. If you answered false, you're correct. The plant has been tested repeatedly and cleared of this charge by the National Poison Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and the American Medical Association. The Poison Index (POINSINDEX) Information Service, the main information resource for poison control centers across the country, reports that even if a 50-pound child consumed more than 500 poinsettia bracts the consequences would not be fatal. However, this does NOT mean that poinsettias should be eaten. Ingestion can cause stomach irritation and discomfort. The sticky white sap also may cause skin irritation for some people.

7. Do you know the best way to prolong the life of this Christmas plant? Avoid hot or cold drafts, keep the soil moist not soggy, and place in a room with sufficient natural light and temperatures of around 60 to 70 degrees F. Water when the soil begins to dry. If you wait until the leaves begin to wilt, it's too late. Above all, protect it from exposure to wind or cold on the way home from the store. Poinsettias are highly sensitive to cold temperatures and even a few minutes of exposure to 50-degree F or lower temperatures will cause them to wilt. But when cared for properly, poinsettias usually will outlast your desire to keep them!

*(Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor, University of Vermont was used as a resource for this article.)*

*Mike McQueen, Home Grounds Regional Extension Agent  
<https://sites.aces.edu/group/homegrounds/blog/>*

# OREGANO

By Gary and Janet Smith

Many herbs other than Basil, which we discussed in the October, 2014 issue of *Garden Thyme*, are members of the mint family (Lamiaceae). That is certainly true of Oregano. It's name comes from the Greek words oros (mountain) and ganos (joy). The warm, balsamic and aromatic flavor or oregano makes it the perfect addition to Mediterranean and Mexican cuisines. We would agree, much of the joy in eating pizza or lasagna is due to the flavor of oregano.

Oregano is a perennial herb native to warm, temperate western and southwestern Eurasia and the Mediterranean region. Oregano is related to the herb marjoram, sometimes being referred to as wild marjoram. Oregano has rose, purple or white flowers and spade-shaped leaves. It is known organically as Origanum and is called wild marjoram in many parts of Europe.

Nutrient qualities of oregano include the fact that it is a good source of fiber. Fiber works in the body to bind to bile salts and cancer-causing toxins in the colon and remove them from the body. This forces the body to break down cholesterol to make more bile salts. Oregano is also a bountiful source of many food nutrients. It is an excellent source of Vitamin K, a very good source of manganese and a good source of iron and calcium.

Oregano is not a commonly allergenic food and is not known to contain measureable amounts of oxalates or purines.

Flavor up your meals and snacks with oregano:

- Garnish pizza with some fresh oregano
- Oregano goes great with healthy sautéed mushrooms and onions
- Adding a few sprigs of fresh oregano to a container of olive oil will infuse the oil with the essence of the herb
- Fresh oregano makes an aromatic addition to omelets and frittatas
- Sprinkle some chopped oregano onto homemade garlic bread
- Add oregano to salad dressings

Oregano has shown antimicrobial activity in a number of studies. Oregano oil is a powerful antimicrobial because it contains an essential compound called carvacol.

From WebMD:

*Oregano is a plant. The leaf is used to make medicine.*

*Oregano is used for respiratory tract disorders such as cough, asthma, croup and bronchitis. It is also used for gastrointestinal (GI) disorders such as heartburn and bloating. Other uses include treating menstrual cramps, rheumatoid arthritis, urinary tract infections, headaches and heart conditions.*

*The oil of Oregano is taken by mouth for intestinal parasites, allergies, sinus pain, arthritis, cold and flu, swine flu, earaches and fatigue. It is applied to the skin for conditions including acne, athlete's foot, oily skin, dandruff, canker sores, warts, ringworm, rosacea and psoriasis; as well as for insect and spider bites, gum disease, toothaches, muscle pain and varicose veins. Oregano oil is also used topically as an insect repellent.*

Oregano contains chemicals that might help reduce cough and spasms. Oregano also might help digestion by increasing the bile flow and fighting against some bacteria, viruses, fungi, intestinal worms and other parasites.



Photo from sunset.com



Photo from www.organicfacts.net

## Scientific classification

Kingdom:	<a href="#">Plantae</a>
(unranked):	<a href="#">Angiosperms</a>
(unranked):	<a href="#">Eudicots</a>
(unranked):	<a href="#">Asterids</a>
Order:	<a href="#">Lamiales</a>
Family:	<a href="#">Lamiaceae</a>
Genus:	<a href="#">Origanum</a>
Species:	<b><i>O. vulgare</i></b>

## Binomial name

***Origanum vulgare***

From Wikipedia.com



## Protecting Plants From Winter's Blast



Fall in Alabama means temperatures in the 70s one day, in the 30's the next. It is the lower temperatures that brings questions about protecting landscape plants from those cold weather blasts (even though it's not winter...yet).

We most often think about freeze damage to our plants in the late winter and early spring. Temperatures warm up a bit and plants may even have started putting on new growth when the last freeze hits.

These quick freezes after a bout of warm weather cause more plant damage than sharp, freezing temperatures during mid-winter. If you remember last year, figs really took a beating with the last freeze. Protecting tender plants will help your landscape survive the worst of winter weather.

### Protection starts at planting

You may have heard the expression, "right plant, right place". Just like the rooms in our house (my house anyway), different areas of the landscape may have different environmental conditions, such as temperature and sun exposure. It's important to find the right microclimate for what you want to plant.

Take rosemary, for instance. Most plant tags and literature cite rosemary as a zone 8 and higher evergreen. Because of this, you may want to grow it in a protected area - not on the north side of the house, but rather on the south side along a wall.

Brick and rock walls are wonderful at absorbing the sun's rays during the day to provide a little extra protection during cool winter nights.

The same type of microclimate change exists in low-lying areas, where frost pockets like to settle and sit around a while. This is why fruit orchards are typically planted on higher ground.

During the time that fruit trees are budding and flowering, Alabama's last freeze typically arrives, doing more damage to those planted in the frost pockets. Leave the low-lying areas for the plants that can take it.

### Freshen up that mulch

Most landscapes receive a makeover in the spring, when the majority of gardeners wake up from their winter naps. But a mulch makeover is equally important in the fall. In winter, frost penetration is less likely to occur in mulched area.

Evergreens must absorb moisture in winter as well as summer. A winter mulching may prevent soil water from freezing and becoming unavailable to plants.

### Keep on watering

The swift winds of winter weather tend to damage plants by drying them out. Watering landscape plants and fruit trees well before a freeze is an easy way to reduce freeze damage.

Water well out to the drip line in the morning, being careful not to overwater. There is a difference between saturated soil and mucky mess.

Water acts as an insulator, capturing warmth during the day for extra protection during freezing night temperatures.

It's important to remember that wetting the foliage will offer no protection. Overhead irrigation is often used by commercial fruit growers for freeze protection, but the irrigation is applied constantly and methodically.

### Don't prune or fertilize

New growth is very tender and more susceptible to freeze damage. If you have ever pruned a plant before, you know that pruning stimulates new growth. New growth due to fall pruning is much more vulnerable. Be sure and prune plants at the appropriate time.

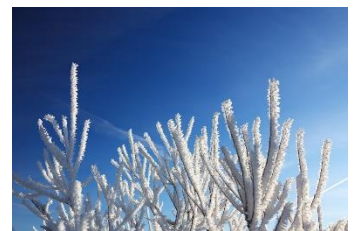
The same is true for fertilization. Fertilizing too late in the year may also result in new tender growth. For lawns, shrubs and trees that go dormant in the winter, lay off the fertilizer later in the season.

### Give them shelter

There are other ways of protecting plants, such as covering, wind breaks and moving tender plants in containers into shelter such as a basement.

But the easiest thing to do is think about the plant as it is planted, and find the perfect microclimate in your own landscape.

*By Dani Carroll, from The Anniston Star, Sunday, November 23, 2014*



*All photos from www.flickr.com*