



Master Gardener Newsletter

• New Mexico State University
 • Cooperative Extension Service
 • U.S. Department of Agriculture
 • College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

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Plant of the Month

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NEW MEXICO PIÑON OR PIÑON PINE

The Piñon or Piñon pine group grows in southwestern U.S., California to west Texas, north to Wyoming and in Mexico. The New Mexico Piñon (*Pinus edulis*) and the similar Mexico Piñon (*Pinus cembroides*) are both available at nurseries. The New Mexico Piñon comes from the highest elevations and is the most cold tolerant of the Piñon pines, whereas, the Mexican Piñon is more heat tolerant and survives well as far as the Rocky Mountains.

The Piñon is a beautiful though small, extremely slow-growing compact tree, which offers incredible structure to a desert garden. Younger specimens have dense foliage and a pyramid shape, resembling a 10-15 ft. Christmas tree. The New Mexico Piñon, our state tree, is found at elevations of between 5,000 and 7,000 feet on lower mountain slopes, plateaus and mesas. (New Mexico adopted the Piñon (*Pinus edulis*) pine on March 16, 1949 as its State Tree. Ten years later, Nevada adopted the single-leaf Piñon (*Pinus monophylla*) as its State Tree.) The Piñon grows as far north as Fort Collins, Colorado often with native junipers. There are vast areas of the Four Corners region that are referred to as piñon-juniper woodlands.

The name Piñon originates from the 1500s Spanish explorers, who named the tree "pino piñonero", or "nut-bearing pine". Its bark is dark and rough, taking nearly 200 years to produce a 1-foot diameter trunk. The tree's lifespan ranges from 150 years and over—a Piñon can live as long as 1,000 years, ranging from 200 feet tall trees, to bushes that can reach a maximum height of 10 feet. Once established, the trees may start production as early as 8 years from seed and they will continue production for their lifespan.

—**Icons of the Southwest:** The sweet Piñon wood fragrance is associated with pueblos and adobe homes and evokes images of sprawling mesas. Harvested for timber and firewood over the centuries, the Ancestral Puebloans, formerly known as the Anasazi, used Piñon poles as door headers in their dwellings. The Piñon's wood is highly prized for firewood all over the Southwest and West. The fragrance of Piñon wood, especially when burned, is unmistakable. When burned in the fireplace, the smoke has a sweet perfumy fragrance that is unforgettable.

Article Continued on Page 2.

Please submit information, articles, and suggested topics for the January newsletter to Ann Shine-Ring by Monday, the 28th of December:

Contact Info:
asring@hughes.net
 (575) 640-7177

New Mexico Piñon Pine—Continued from Front Page**—Icons of the Southwest...Continued**

The Piñon's wood is also used to construct latillas and "coyote" fences, among other uses. The Piñon's crown is rounded and it often has a crooked, gnarled trunk. Its branches are exceptionally beautiful. The gray to reddish brown bark is furrowed with scaly ridges. The thick egg-shaped cones are light brown to a yellowish-brown and have blunt scales up to 2" long.

Currently Piñon trees in the Southwest are very much endangered by droughts which make them susceptible to borers and huge numbers have died in the past two or three years. It is important for humans to protect Piñon as much as possible while drought conditions threaten them.

A native to high plains, mesas, plateaus, canyons, foothills and lower mountain slopes, the Piñon pine requires little water, produces wonderful cones (both male and female) and its nuts tend to be large for pine, and quite edible and tasty. In fact, these nuts have been used for food for centuries by Native Americans and later by the Spanish and are still widely eaten. Piñon nuts are delicious and nutritious. High in fats, iron, vitamin A, thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin, Piñon nuts were, and still are, a highly coveted crop.

Piñons fulfill multiple uses, not only in providing a bountiful harvest of edible nut pines and aromatic cones which are sold at prices that make them a worthwhile commercial crop that will out produce cereal crops and other methods of farming operations based on their cash return per acre. The edible, oily and large seeds are about 1/2" long and known as 'Piñones', 'pine nuts', 'Indian nuts', 'Christmas nuts' & 'Piñon nuts', are harvested for commercial purposes raw and cooked for use in candies. The annual harvest of wild Piñon nuts exceeds a million pounds.

—Tree Characteristics: The dark green needles of the New Mexico Piñon are short (1.2 to 2 inches) and are always clustered in pairs from a papery sheath, the thick needles are slightly curved and pointed at the tip. Many Piñon trees have a distinct profile that includes a thick trunk, numerous branches and a rounded crown. Set off from the junipers that they co-exist with, the darker Piñons are a contrast to the blue-green coloration of the junipers.

The shiny cones, which usually grow singly at the ends of branchlets, open widely as they dry, releasing around two dozen thin-shelled wingless seeds. The New Mexico Piñon can be differentiated from the other local "Single-leaf Piñon" by the fact that the leaves (needles) occur in bundles of two, whereas *Pinus monophylla* (Singleleaf Piñon) has needles bundled singly. The two trees are often found together.

Generally long-lived, Piñons may become infested with dwarf mistletoe that sinks its root-like tendrils into the wood. Living off the Piñon, mistletoe draws nutrients and moisture from the plant. When this parasitic plant produces seeds, the sticky seeds are ejected out of pods and may travel 60 miles per hour and up to 50 feet away. If the sticky seed lands on another Piñon, that tree may become infected.

Mistletoe may stress the tree, but drought, lightning and insects take a greater toll on it. At times, hillsides may turn brown as trees die; setting up a scenario of high fire danger that can sweep through the dead forests. Sometimes catastrophic, these fires also open up sites where jays may bury their excess seeds, thus continuing the cycle of the Piñon woodland.

Article Continued on Page 3

**FACTS PAGE:**

Family: *Pinaceae*, Pine Family; conifers **Origin:** Native

Other Common Names: Two-leaf Piñon, Piñon

Fruits/Seeds: Seeds are pine nuts

Height: Generally 20'-30' **Spacing:** 15'-30'

Habitat Preferred: Piñon-Juniper Belt (4000'-6000' elevation)

Sun Exposure: Full Sun **Foliage:** Evergreen

Bloom Color: Male - Yellow catkins, like papery cones
Female cones with edible seeds

Other details: Drought-tolerant; suitable for xeriscaping

Hardiness: USDA Zone 8a: to -12.2 °C (10 °F)

Soil pH Requirements: Dry and rocky soils; 6.6 to 7.5 (neutral); 7.6 to 7.8 (mildly alkaline); and 7.9 to 8.5 (alkaline)

Insect Problems: Piñon pitch borer, ips, spindle gall midge

Disease Problems: Black stain root disease, mistletoe

➤ **Eight Species of True Piñons** (*Pinus* subsection *Cembroides*):

Pinus cembroides – Mexican Piñon

Pinus culminicola – Potosi Piñon

Pinus edulis – Colorado Piñon or Two-needle Piñon

Pinus johannis – Johann's Piñon or Border Piñon

(includes *P. discolor*)

Pinus monophylla – Single-leaf Piñon

Pinus orizabensis – Orizaba Piñon

Pinus quadrifolia – Parry Piñon (includes *P. juarezensis*).

Pinus remota – Texas Piñon or Papershell Piñon

These additional Mexican species are also related and mostly called Piñons:

Pinus maximartinezii – Big-cone Piñon

Pinus nelsonii – Nelson's Piñon as are also the three

bristlecone pines of the high mountains of the southwest U.S., and the Lacebark Pines of Asia.

Pinus pinceana – Weeping Piñon

Pinus rzedowskii – Rzedowski's Pine

Some species are known to hybridize, most notably *P. quadrifolia* with *P. monophylla*, and *P. edulis* with *P. monophylla*.

Sources:

- Kiowa Conservation District, Colorado
- Landscaping w/ Native Plants of the Southwest, G.O. Miller, 2007
- Link: <http://www.conifers.org/pi/pin/edulis.htm> (The Piñon Pine by Damian Fagan)
- NatureSongs.com
- "The Desert Pine: The Edible Pine" © R. Dailey, May 2006
- Utah State University Extension Source
- UTEP Native Plant Database
- Wikipedia

(Research and compilation of information for this article conducted by Ann Shine-Rina, Certified Master Gardener)

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New Mexico Piñon Pine—Continued from Page 2Piñon
Jay

—**Importance to Wildlife:** The Piñon is extremely important to local wildlife. Piñon nuts are eaten by many mammals and birds, notably the Western Scrub Jays and wild turkeys. The Piñon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) shown above takes its name from the tree, and Piñon nuts form an important part of its diet. This Jay is very important for the regeneration of Piñon woods, as it stores large numbers of the seeds in the ground for later use, and excess seeds not used are in an ideal position to grow into new trees. The Mexican Jay is also important for the dispersal of some Piñon species as, but less often, is the Clark's Nutcracker. Many other species of animal also eat Piñon nuts without dispersing them.

A Piñon Jay can discern by color or weight between a viable nut and one that did not mature through the embryonic cycle. If the seed's thin shell coats are two-toned or if the shell is lightweight, the jays discard the duds and grab the keepers with their stout beaks. The birds gorge themselves, but also store seeds. These seeds will either be consumed or cached somewhere away from the trees for future use. That the jays can remember the locations of these caches is remarkable.

Piñon Jays are not the only birds interested in Piñon nuts. Clark's Nutcrackers, Western Scrub Jays, Steller's Jays and wild turkeys also eat the ripe seeds. The Jays and Nutcrackers create caches like the Piñon Jays, but the turkeys gobble down the seeds, shells and all. The turkey's tough gizzard grinds the shells down to a pulp. Other wildlife that compete for this nutritious food source are black bears, mule deer, woodrats, Piñon mice, ground squirrels, chipmunks, and porcupines, although the latter prefers the inner bark of the Piñon tree.

Piñon nuts are also a great source of food for songbirds, quail, squirrels, chipmunks, black bear and mule deer. In fact, the wild trees provide cover for a large number of desert residents. Robins, sparrows, mockingbirds, thrushes, owls, jays and hawks nest in the thick cover provided by the short needles. Rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and even coyotes live in excavated burrows beneath the branches.

—**Planting Piñons:** When planting Piñons as with any other tree, make the planting hole twice as big as the container. You do not need to amend the soil. Piñon roots can push through caliche in their search for water and nutrients. Adding amendments to the hole can cause the plants to become rootbound and die. Although Piñons are drought-tolerant, they do need some water to survive. Many wild Piñons in the Southwest (some hundreds of years old) were devastated by a bark beetle infestation. Although the bark beetles are always present, a severe drought weakened the Piñons to such a state that they became highly susceptible to damage caused by the beetle. Additionally, when the Piñons are stressed, they give out a scent (undetectable by humans but highly attractive to bark beetles) which draws the bark beetles to the weakened trees.

Nevertheless, if not given too much water and a systemic is used to combat the bark beetle during times of high infestation, Piñons are a wonderful addition to any desert garden. Plant them in the transition zone, or in the arid zone of your garden. During high drought periods, water them one to every two weeks. One word of caution: Piñon prefer alkaline soil (although, through the years, they will actually change the soil to a more acidic compound). There is no need to amend the soil when planting Piñons, especially if you live in the West or Southwest.

—**Seed Collection:** Collect cones from vigorous trees in late summer and fall just before they completely open to drop seeds. Spread cones on racks to dry so they will release seeds. Cones may be shaken to release seeds. Store at a moisture content of 5-10% fresh weight.

—**Reproduction:** The pine seed of the Piñon tree, depending on the variety, will grow in climatic zones 1 to 10 inclusive. They are able to grow in soils ranging from wet clay to sandy loam. There are about 115 species of pine, although different authors accept anything between 105 to 125 species and all these pines have a distinction of being adaptable to wide ranges of conditions.

If winter and spring seasons are wet, the Piñon will produce a good crop of nuts (or piñones) the following summer and fall between August and October. Piñons reproduce by seed only, and it takes about 25 years for a tree to begin producing seed cones. At around 75 to 100 years of age, the production of seed cones diminishes.

—**Maintenance:** Prune to maintain shape, remove dead growth, prevent complete soil dryness, and fertilize 3 times a year with lawn fertilizer 3:1:2 ratio

—**Germination:** The best germination is obtained following planting in coarse river sand or pumice with about 25% moisture. As with most seeds, they will rot if the soil is too wet. It is important to add *mycorrhizal fungus* gathered from under a stand of other pine trees, because in the absence of the fungi the trees are likely to suffer phosphorus deficiency and make poor growth. Once established, young pine nut trees should not be over-watered. Once the nut shell has fallen, you may replant into deeper containers. Be careful to avoid breaking the taproot.

Piñon are a very good choice for xeriscape landscapes. Avoid planting Piñon in lawn areas where regular irrigation is required. While a Piñon tree will need to be watered several times after it has been transplanting to get it established, it is not tolerant of long-term and regular irrigation, especially in heavy clay soils. Plant Piñon pines on berms or dry areas and avoid low spots and areas near building down spouts. Under ideal conditions, Piñon may reach 25 feet tall and 20 feet wide after many years. Nuts will likely not develop unless there are several piñon trees in the yard. Single trees will develop nutshells in cones, but nutshells will be hollow due to a lack of wind-borne pollen from other trees.

This species of pine should be expected to start producing cones from about year 6. However, on poor soils production may not start until about year 12. Each cone holds about 50 nuts and 100 kg of cones holds about 20 kg of nuts. Prune the trees after 3 years to remove all the lower branches. Clearing lower branches facilitates the production and harvesting of the nuts.



Article Continued on Page 4

New Mexico Piñon Pine—Continued from Page 3

—**Proper Maintenance:** Piñon pines are a hardy species, but it is still important to minimize stress and wounding. They are drought-tolerant and do not grow well above 7,500 feet. To reduce stress, provide adequate space, avoid over watering, and do not plant them in soils high in clay. Activities that can cause wounding are construction, planting, yard work and logging. If you are building on a site with established Piñons, do not locate structures within two tree heights of the tree. This is the extent of the underground root system. Proper planting of new or transplanted Piñons can minimize problems in the short- and long-term. Use lawnmowers and weed trimmers carefully to avoid trunk damage. Log carefully to avoid basal scarring and accidental branch removal.



In general, closely planted and overcrowded Piñons are more susceptible to insects and diseases than trees with adequate light and space. Excessive moisture in irrigated landscapes promotes succulent growth and branch cracking. These conditions provide good entry, egg laying and feeding sites for some insect species. Pruning can also create infestation sites. Allow enough time for wounds to close before adult insects are active.

—**Uses and Management:** Piñon pine is worthless as forage for livestock. Although not preferred, cattle will use Piñon needles, but it's believed to cause abortion in cows. The seeds are important wildlife food for several songbirds, quails, squirrels, chipmunks, black bears, and mule deer. The seed crop of Piñon pine is valuable and is used in making candies, cakes, and cookies. The seeds were a staple food in American Indian diets and were eaten raw, roasted, or ground into flour. Seed crops are erratic, depending on moisture, and Indian migrations were determined by location of seed crops. Needles were steeped for tea. The inner bark served as starvation food for American Indians.

Today, incense is made from the crushed cones. Puebloans and other Native Americans still use the sticky sap as a caulking compound for watertight baskets and as glue for turquoise jewelry. The Navajo burn the resin to create fumes to cure head colds and the Hopis use the resin to waterproof and repair pottery.

The annual harvest of Piñon nuts exceeds one million pounds. This crop is second in commercial value only to pecans among uncultivated nuts of the United States. Singleleaf Piñon Pine (*P. monophylla*) nuts are larger and more desirable than those from the New Mexico Piñon (*P. edulis*). The Piñon is also desired as a Christmas tree because of its aromatic fragrance, and the wood is used for fuel and fence posts. ■



Piñon Needle Scale (*Matsucoccus acalyptus*)

Piñon Pine Diseases & Insects

W. R. Jacobi and W.S. Cranshaw
Colorado State University Extension, Sept. 2009

Colorado State University's Extension Service provides an excellent resource on Piñon Pine Diseases and Insects, Article No. 2.948

Link: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/02948.html>

This article addresses the following topics:

- Major diseases including black stain root disease, dwarf mistletoe, armillaria root disease, & piñon decline.
- Common insect pests such as piñon pitch mass borer, Ips beetles, piñon tip moth, piñon pitch nodule moth, piñon needle scale, and piñon spindlegall midge.

This exceptional research article contains many color photos. It also addresses Signs and Symptoms as well as Management Options.



Dwarf mistletoe broom



Vertical staining from black stain root disease

BACKYARD BRAINTEASER

needles in a haystack

How to identify individual conifers from among hundreds of trees.

With thousands of conifers available, it's easy to see how this group of trees often gets lumped together. From a distance, pines are often mistaken for cedars, spruces and even firs. Even when you take a closer look at the needles, it can still be confusing.

So how can you distinguish one conifer from another? Our resident Plant Doctor, Melinda Myers, can help. She taught a tree-and-shrub class for more than 12 years, so she's a pro at knowing the tips and tricks for nailing down the IDs of conifers.

"I try to make it fun and simple," Melinda says. "For example, one of my tips is for hemlocks. I used to sew, and if you're familiar with a running stitch, you know that this stitch is used to 'lock the hem' in place. Well, if you look at the

upper side of a hemlock branch, you'll see a row of needles lying on the stem that looks like a running stitch."

Melinda has other easy-to-remember tips, too. Firs, for instance, have flat needles, while those of a spruce are angular and can be rolled between your fingers. Also, hemlocks have short needles, and yews have dark green, flat needles.

Pines also have some unique characteristics. First of all, all pines have needles in bunches. So if you see this type of formation, you know you're looking at a pine.

But then the next question is, what kind of pine is it? For this, count the number of needles. If it has five needles, it's a white or Swiss stone pine. If there are only two needles, it could be an Austrian, pinyon or Scotch pine.

Go ahead and put some of Melinda's tips to the test. How many of the conifers below can you identify? ✨



1. Arborvitae
2. Tamarack
3. Balsam fir
4. Bald cypress
5. Common juniper
6. Scotch pine
7. White pine
8. Yew
9. Blue spruce
10. Hemlock
11. Austrian pine
12. Dawn redwood

ANSWERS
 G:12, H:6, I:3, J:10, K:2, L:9
 A:1, B:7, C:4, D:11, E:8, F:5

PHOTOGRAPH: DONNA WESCHER



Site Selection and Preparation for Christmas Tree Planting

Esteban Herrera, NMSU Extension Horticulturist

If you are planning to purchase a live plant for your Christmas tree this year, then you should read Guide H-410, Site Selection and Preparation for Christmas Tree Planting, NMSU Cooperative Extension Service.

Link: <http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/ h/H-410.pdf>

This Guide provides information on the following environmental conditions which need to be considered before your tree is planted: 1) elevation, 2) aspect, 3) slope, 4) soil properties, 5) irrigation water availability, and 6) existing vegetation.

Professor Herrera also provides information on planning and site preparation.



Buying a Living Christmas Tree

Esteban Herrera, NMSU Extension Horticulturist

If you are anticipating buying a live plant for your Christmas tree this year, then you should read Guide H-421, Buying A Living Christmas Tree, NMSU Cooperative Extension Service.

Link: <http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/ h/H-421.pdf>

Professor Herrera asks us to consider buying a living, containerized evergreen tree for our next Christmas tree. He states that a living Christmas tree will provide enjoyment long after the holiday season has passed and he says that a containerized Christmas tree continues to grow and can be used repeatedly in the future. Or, it can be planted out-of-doors as an ornamental or for a privacy screen.

This Guide provides information on, 1) selecting a tree, and 2) caring for a tree.

Master Gardeners' Garden Expo

By Ann Palormo, Certified Master Gardener

This may be a little after the fact but I don't think it is ever too late to say "Thank you" to people who volunteer their precious time—in this case to work at the Master Gardeners' Garden Expo in October.

Certified Master Gardeners and Interns teamed up to present workshops on eight different topics which were offered both Saturday and Sunday. Our audience was considerably larger Saturday. Many people attended four sessions that day and returned Sunday to hear the other four workshops. The combined numbers showed over 100 people sitting in on the workshops. Our participants were definitely anxious to broaden their gardening knowledge.

A personal thanks to Ann Shine-Ring for keeping Saturday's program running smoothly while I handled my "double-booking" conflict.

Thanks also to Jackye Meinecke who welcomed us with open arms and certainly helped make everything run smoothly. She is ready to host us in the spring and I have reserved the weekend of April 24-25. As Master Gardeners, we may want to review what we are doing to see if we can do it better. I welcome all suggestions. (Email: apalormo@nmsu.edu)

SAVE THE DATE:

**June 10-12, 2010
New Mexico State
Master Gardener Conference
Albuquerque, NM**

It's going to be chock-full of cutting edge speaker presentations, spectacular garden tours, various social events and, of course, fabulous food. More detail will be provided at a future date.

Dixie's Honey-Do List for December



If our bullets are followed by (MI), the information came from *Month by Month Gardening in the Desert Southwest* by Mary Irish. We just wanted you to know that this is an outstanding book.

Seasons Greetings To All

Ornamentals

- Deadhead pansies and other cool-season flowering plants.
- Begin pruning shrubs. Vigorous shrubs such as photinia and cotoneaster may be pruned by 30%. Evergreens are typically more temperamental so limit limb removal to 20%.
- Save your evergreen cuttings for holiday decorations.
- Bring poinsettias into bright indirect light and keep them warm (above 65°F) and watered.
- Consider a living holiday tree this year. Plant it in early January. "Christmas" type trees appropriate for our area include junipers, pines, deodar cedars, and arborvitae. (See page 6)
- Remove the decorative wrap from holiday plants. Keep them away from heater vents.
- Begin transplanting materials that were not root pruned in the fall.



Fruits, Nuts & Shade Trees



- Begin your dormant season pruning. Make sure a tree is truly dormant. Make a small cut at tip of a branch. If sap runs, then wait to prune until a cut weeps no sap. (MI)
- Do not top trees.
- Begin planting hearty bareroot trees as they become available at nurseries. Wait to plant cold-tender species.
- Continue to harvest pecans.

Vegetables & Herbs

- Plant romaine, leaf, and head lettuce seed.
- Harden off lettuce transplants and plant later this month.
- Do not fertilize or prune this month. (MI)
- Most cool-season vegetables are unaffected by light frost, but be prepared to cover tender crops with light cloth, newspapers, or frost blankets on cold nights. If you have vegetables in pots, be prepared to cover them or move them into a warmer location on cold nights. (MI)



Lawns/Grasses

- Continue regular management of cool season grasses but discontinue fertilization.
- Do not plant either lawns or ornamental grasses this month. (MI)
- Water dormant warm-season species once or twice a month to a depth of 6–8 inches.
- If you haven't cut back ornamental grasses yet, do so early this month. Save any flowering heads for use in dried arrangements or holiday wreaths. (MI)



Dixie's Honey-Dos for December – Continued

Roses

- Do not prune roses until late January or early February, but before Valentine's Day.
- Continue deadheading roses regularly. Remove any dead or diseased canes. (MI)
- Be sure to keep the area around rose plants clean of debris and fallen leaves, particularly if powdery mildew has been a problem. (MI)
- In mild winter conditions, extend watering your roses deeply every 7-10 days depending on the weather. (MI)
- Begin to plan which new roses you'd like to plant in your garden in late March or early April after the danger of freezing has passed.



Cacti & Succulents

- This is not a good time to plant any succulents outside—wait until mid-January to plant even cool-season succulents. (MI)
- Other than Christmas cactus, do not fertilize cacti this month. (MI)
- Do not prune succulents this month. (MI)
- Water sparingly this month. You can water cool-season succulents once during this month.

Miscellaneous

- Clean your potting bench, garage, and shed; reorganize gardening tools.
- On pretty days work up garden beds.
- Consider garden gifts for the holidays such as bulb planters, trowels, pruning equipment and gift cards.
- Remember to water established trees deeply at least once a month. Water newly planted material more often.
- Plan landscape changes such as enlarging beds and reducing turf areas.
- Peruse garden catalogues and drink hot cocoa.



Ornamental Peppers

Plant Profile

Botanical Name:	<i>Capsicum annuum</i>
Hardiness:	Zones 9-11; treated as an annual elsewhere
Size:	6-20 inches high, 6-18 inches wide
Fruit Color:	White, purple, brown, red, orange & yellow
Light Needs:	Full sun
Soil Type:	Moist, organically rich, fertile and well-draining
Growing Advice:	Mulch around plants to prevent weeds and to retain moisture. Water regularly; peppers require 1" of water a week. Pick often—the more you harvest, the more they produce.

Days to Maturity: 70-90

Hybridizers have introduced compact ornamental pepper varieties sized to fit small gardens, hanging baskets and containers. Unlike their kin, which hang beneath foliage, ornamental plants produce upright clusters of peppers that face the sky. As fruits ripen, a single plant may sport three or four different peppers shading from yellow to orange, red, purple or brown.

Ornamentals come in an array of shapes, much like the more common peppers, but smaller. Though edible, ornamentals may be super-hot or exceedingly pungent, so choose cultivars that suit your growing area and taste buds.

Source: Birds & Blooms, Oct./Nov. 2009

New Master Gardener Profile: Kelly Covert



For MG intern Kelly Covert, gardening is a stress-buster. "There is nothing like getting out there and digging in the soil and smelling and feeling it to make the day's worries melt away," she says. Kelly states that gardening provides her with so much pleasure.

Kelly has been an active gardener all her life. She and her husband Mike came to Las Cruces over 20 years ago to go to college and never left. They live south of Mesilla in San Pablo where she practices her love of gardening on half an acre.

Native plants are one of Kelly's favorites because they take care of themselves. Beyond that she likes to grow veggies because, "to reap the benefits and share them is the best."

In spite of a life-long passion for gardening, Kelly felt she could learn a lot through the Master Gardener Program. She was not disappointed and came away realizing there was still SO much more she could learn.

For Kelly one of her fondest gardening memories involves a gathering of friends who helped Kelly and Mike install a pond and helped to build their first raised bed on her birthday.

Kelly loves to be outside, especially camping. She loves to read and always has a book going. She is also an active volunteer at a number of projects around the community. She recently accepted a position with the Doña Ana Arts Council and got there just in time to be part of the Renaissance ArtsFaire.

The Covert family includes three daughters. Hannah, the oldest, is in school at the University of New Mexico, Kelcee is a sophomore at Las Cruces High and the youngest, Emma, is 8 years old.

One piece of advice that Kelly likes to share with everyone who gardens is, "Take time to enjoy your garden, sit in it, show it off, care for it." These are words to live by.

(Profile written by Ann Palermo)



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Tom Packard	Dec. 15
Pam Crane	Dec. 18
MaryVee Cammack	Dec. 22
Clayton White	Dec. 24
Christine Chavez	Dec. 25
Velina Hames	Dec. 26

**Master Gardener
2010 Calendar**

When signing up for Hotline Duty next year, please follow these new guidelines:

► **Certified MG's – Sign up on the blue line on the Calendar**

All participating Certified Master Gardeners will be serving as mentors to the new Interns, including demonstrating an actual Hands Free (HF) call on the Hotline. Additional orientation will include: 1) review of arrival procedures, 2) office equipment operation, 3) source of information review, and 4) using the Hotline Contact Sheet.

► **2010 Interns must sign up on the orange lines on the Calendar**

Before signing up, the 2010 Interns must first attend one of the scheduled Hotline Training sessions (either Dec. 17 or Jan. 7 at 9-11am).

The Interns will then have the opportunity to sign up immediately following their Hotline Training session.

Information provided by Pam Crane



Reblooming Christmas & Thanksgiving Cacti

By Ward Upham (11/23/09)

(Article Contributed by Dale Petzold, MG Intern)

Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) are popular flowering holiday plants. Both are epiphytes native to the jungles of South America. Epiphytic plants grow on other plants and use them for support but not for nutrients. Though these cacti are different species, they will hybridize and produce varying stem shapes. Christmas cactus normally has smooth stem segments. Thanksgiving Cactus has hook-like appendages on each segment. Flowering will not occur unless induced by temperature and/or light treatment. If the temperature is held at 50° to 55°F, flowering will occur regardless of day length. But flowering usually is not uniform. Temperatures below 50°F prevent flowering. Nights greater than 12 hours long and temperatures between 59 and 69 degrees also can generate flowers. Twenty-five consecutive long nights is enough for flower initiation. It takes an additional 9 to 10 weeks for flowers to complete development and bloom.

Both of these cacti like bright indirect light. Too much sun may cause leaves to turn yellow. Common household temperatures are fine. Soil should be kept constantly moist but not waterlogged. These plants seem to flower best if kept a little pot-bound. If you need to repot, try waiting until spring.

Source: Gardening123.com

Link:

http://www.gardening123.com/articles/display_article.asp?MS=6&SS=60&ID=103147&Page=1&



Simple Tips for Better Garden Soil

By Barbara Pleasant, April/May 2009

(Article Contributed by Dale Petzold, MG Intern)

What techniques will you use to build better soil this season? Whether you're filling new beds with bags of compost or tinkering with loam you've been nurturing for years, your first task may be to change the way you think. Sure, soil holds roots in place and helps them find moisture and nutrients. But truly superior soil goes beyond providing plants with a comfortable place to live and a seat at nature's table. When it gets really good, soil does things we humans are just learning to appreciate.

Some gardeners think that building better soil is mostly a matter of adding the right amounts of the right organic amendments, and this is basically true. Above-average levels of organic matter are one key to developing soil that functions well as a nutrient storehouse and is a root-friendly place to be. But looking to compost or any other type of organic matter as the one thing your soil needs is like reading the first chapter of a book and saying you're done. There is much more to the story.

To read the complete article, use the Link provided below.

Source: Mother Earth News

Link: [http://www.motheearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/Better-Garden-](http://www.motheearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/Better-Garden-Soil.aspx?utm_content=GRT+eNEWS+10.23.09&utm_campaign=E-+Newsletters&utm_source=iPost&utm_medium=email)

[Soil.aspx?utm_content=GRT+eNEWS+10.23.09&utm_campaign=E-+Newsletters&utm_source=iPost&utm_medium=email](http://www.motheearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/Better-Garden-Soil.aspx?utm_content=GRT+eNEWS+10.23.09&utm_campaign=E-+Newsletters&utm_source=iPost&utm_medium=email)

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

► MG Contact Sheet Now Available Online

The MG Hotline Contact Sheet can now be downloaded from the Master Gardener Webpage. It can be found under "Forms." The MG Time Sheet and the MG Application are also posted at that location. (These are PDF files and cannot be filled out and returned electronically.) Again the new "shorter" MG Web address is <http://aces.nmsu.edu/damg>
(Information provided by Jan Brydon)

Master Gardener Matters

—Monthly Meeting, November 18, 2009—

MG Hotline—Linda Fredrickson reported that the December Hotline calendar still has spaces for interns. The 2010 calendar is ready for sign ups. Blue lines/spaces are for certified MGs and orange for interns. Master Gardeners are urged to sign up for Jan and Feb if you are willing to mentor new interns. (See page 9 in this newsletter for more information)

Jeff's Comments—Computers in the Master Gardener room are for University use only, Please do not use them for personal stuff. However, briefly checking your personal email is okay if you are not busy with calls. Some of the books from the library have been culled, but Jeff will review them before they are given away. It is very important to return the survey forms to let the County know how we feel about moving the extension office to San Miguel. A suggestion was made that we send a letter to our County Commissioners about the proposed move. Bullet points to cover in this letter will be sent out to all Master Gardeners soon.

Newsletter—Ann Shine-Ring stated that any articles and suggestions are due to her by Nov 27. Plant of the Month will be piñon pine.

CoCoRAHS—Joan Lane / Alberta Morgan: Joan is now coordinator for Las Cruces but needs a co-coordinator. Please contact Joan if you are interested in helping her. (Email: mexlane@msn.com)

Graduation/Awards—Valice Raffi: The date is Jan 9, for the Awards Luncheon, to be held at Trails West in Mesilla. There will be plenty of parking available. Fee will be \$10.00 per person for the catered lunch. Interns graduating in Dec. will not have to pay for the lunch. Please sign up now so we know how many people to expect. Please e-mail Juliet (jwx2new@q.com) or phone her at 644-0729. We also need a few people to help with set-up and clean-up.

Education Programs—Joan Woodward: She thanked the previous Program Committee and everyone for their suggestions. Joan is planning a program for Feb that will be thematic and interactive—somewhat different from what we have done in the past.

Web Page—Ann Shine-Ring thanked Jan Brydon for posting our newsletter onto the university's website so quickly.

Farmers Market—Barb reported some troubles lately. We were supposed to have had a table in Nov. and Dec. but no one has signed up to help yet. Consensus was to skip the winter months and begin again in Feb. Dixie has volunteered to run our spring plant sale.

State MG Conference—Ann Shine-Ring will be our liaison with the June 10-12, 2010 conference which will be held in Albuquerque.

☑ Old / Continuing Business

Pecan Field Day—Jeff reported that the Nov. 4th program included discussion about the China trade and growing world market for pecans. If current growth continues, we might not have enough to meet demand in the U.S. There has been a lot of insect damage in pecan orchards this year, so the harvest may be down. Growers were urged to rotate insecticide to reduce resistance. Also, water use is a growing concern as rainfall is predicted to be low in our watershed area (Southern Colorado).

Holiday Potluck—This will be held on our regular meeting date, Dec 16, but at 10 AM for the meeting, and the potluck at 11ish. A sign-up sheet was passed around. If you did not sign-up at the meeting, but plan to attend, contact Bonnie at (mizbons@comcast.com). Also, if you plan to attend but cannot bring food, but can help with set-up/clean-up, or by purchasing paper goods or drinks, also contact Bonnie.

Other—Mona Nelson reported on the Sunscape Workshop held at the Chihuahuan Desert Museum. Speakers were wonderful, if you are interested in native plants Mona recommended you attend this event next year.

☑ New Business

Sustainable Agriculture Workshop—Scheduled for Dec. 8 in Socorro Jeff: Fliers are available at the Office. Jeff is going and has room for one or two others in the truck, \$25.00 includes lunch.

Pecan Conference—March 7-9, 2010: More information to come; will need MG help, and there are many food benefits to helping.

Chile Conference—To be held in Feb: MGs will be needed to help out. There will be a salsa contest.

Other:

- NMSU is holding a farmers conference on Jan. 16 to give information about growing and marketing various vegetables and fruits in Doña Ana County.
- There was a lively discussion about growing medical marijuana in NM followed a question about the new guidelines.
- Alberta is collecting Xmas cards for soldiers. Alberta provided extra cards and she will send them on. These cards will go to soldiers overseas and to those in hospitals. Deadline is Dec 7.
- Special thanks was given to Ann Shine-Ring for our wonderful newsletter.

Education Program—Jeff Anderson provided a power point presentation on "Growing Exotics in Las Cruces" (meaning not native) shrubs, vines and trees that can be successfully grown in Las Cruces area.

Next Meeting – December 16 Holiday Potluck @ 10 AM

Thanks to Janie Elliot, Colette and Susan Blank for the wonderful snacks at Nov mtg.

Bonnie and Juliet



Please note open timeslots for Interns in December and January (*Hotline assignments listed were current as of 11/20/09*)
 Reminder: MG Hours for December, January & February are 9-12 noon

**Master Gardener Hotline Assignments for
December**

Tuesday, Dec. 1 **Ina Goldberg**
Janie Elliot
 Joan Woodward (I)

Friday, Dec. 4 **Pat Anderson**
 Velina Hames (I)
 Janice Servais (I)

Tuesday, Dec. 8 **Pam Crane**
 Hope Movsesian (I)
 Kelly Covert (I)

Friday, Dec. 11 **Katrin Sumpter**
Linda Fredrickson
 Open _____ (I)

Tuesday, Dec. 15 **Alberta Morgan**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Friday, Dec. 18 **Leigh Matthewson**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Tuesday, Dec. 22 **Kristee West**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Friday, Dec. 25 **Holiday**

Tuesday, Dec. 29 **Leigh Matthewson**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

**Master Gardener Hotline Assignments for
January**

Friday, Jan. 1 **Holiday**

Tuesday, Jan. 5 **Marti Taylor**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Friday, Jan. 8 **Dixie LaRock**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Tuesday, Jan. 12 **Mary Thompson**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Friday, Jan. 15 **Leigh Matthewson**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Tuesday, Jan. 19 **Tom Packard**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Friday, Jan. 22 **David Hutchinson**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Tuesday, Jan. 26 **Ina Goldberg**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Friday, Jan. 29 **Leigh Matthewson**
 Open _____ (I)
 Open _____ (I)

Please note there is a new color scheme for 2010 MG and Intern hotline signups—see page 9 for more information.

Thank you to Frank Connor for providing the information on Hotline assignments.

Next Monthly Meeting of the
 Doña Ana County Master Gardeners
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December 16th Meeting & Holiday Potluck Lunch
 To be held at the Cooperative Extension Office from
 10am-12noon

2010 Master Gardeners' Graduation & Awards Ceremony
 Saturday, January 9, 2010 @ Trails West