

# MILBERGER LANDSCAPE & NURSERY

THE GARDENING NEWSLETTER FOR SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS

DECEMBER 2020

## PLANT QUESTIONS

**Will container grown geraniums make it through the winter outside?** No. They need to be protected during freezing weather.

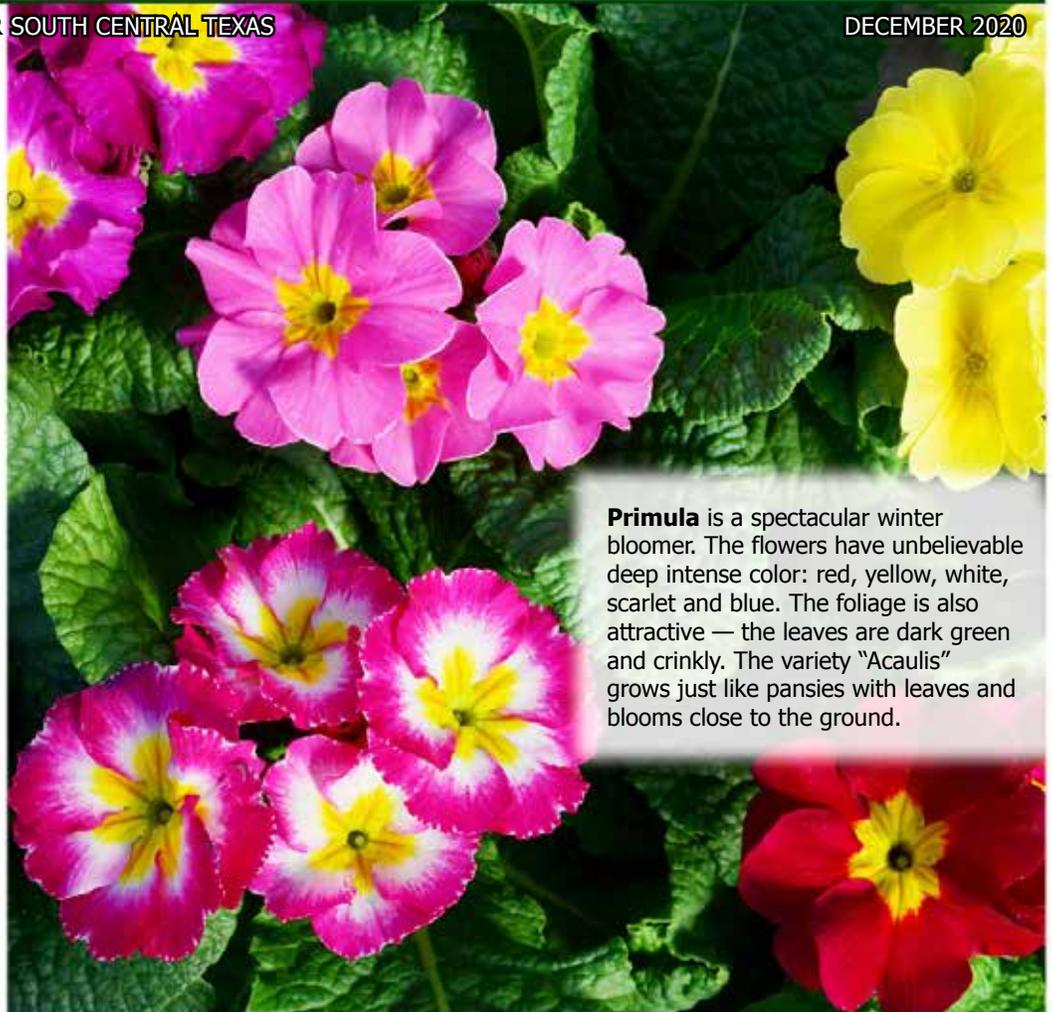
**My zinnias are showing some freeze burn, but the blooms and foliage are largely intact. Is it time to pull them?**

Zinnias are a favorite nectar source for butterflies and other pollinators, you can leave them in place until a major freeze occurs.

**To keep the soil moist for my poinsettia should I add ice cubes every day?**

Try adding ice cubes every other day at first. It will probably be enough in most situations. If the soil dries with the every-other-day schedule, switch to every day. A key part of keeping the poinsettia healthy and blooming for four or five months is to soak the soil once per week in the sink.

If you have gardening or landscaping questions we have the answers. Just ask any of the friendly, knowledgeable, and experienced nursery staff at Milberger's Nursery.



**Primula** is a spectacular winter bloomer. The flowers have unbelievable deep intense color: red, yellow, white, scarlet and blue. The foliage is also attractive — the leaves are dark green and crinkly. The variety "Acaulis" grows just like pansies with leaves and blooms close to the ground.

## WINTER GARDENING EXPERTISE

### Intense Color of Primula

Primula is a spectacular winter bloomer. Primula, also called primrose, grow much like pansies. They are relatively short plants (8 to 12 inches) and form clumps that are covered with blooms until hot weather arrives. Primula, however, requires shade to survive and offer more striking bloom colors than pansies. They do not need direct light but can tolerate some. Primulas maintain blooms every day as long as temperatures remain cool. An essential part of primula care is to protect the plants from pill bugs, slugs and snails. The bloom colors are unbelievably intense, no subtlety here.

(MORE PAGE THREE)

Our web site and the email version of this newsletter contain many color photographs, how-to-do-it diagrams, more complete articles, links to many gardeners references and many more answers to your gardening and landscape questions. Visit [www.MilbergerNursery.com](http://www.MilbergerNursery.com) to sign up. We respect your privacy and we will not share your address or information with anyone not associated with this newsletter.

**HERBS FOR THE HOLIDAY**

# The Thyme is Now!

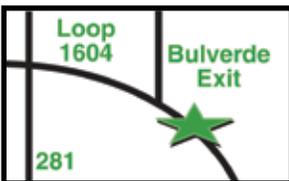
By Donna Fossum, SAWS Conservation Planner

Many fresh herbs are winter tolerant and just begging to be used in your home-cooked meal. Plus, your homegrown herbs make family dinners that much more special. Holiday feasts are the perfect opportunity to incorporate fresh herbs from your garden.

Fresh herbs are a fast and simple way to enhance tried-and-true recipes, even those heavily seasoned with dried herbs. If your recipe calls for dried herbs, use twice the amount of fresh sturdy herbs, such as rosemary, sage and thyme. For delicate herbs, such as parsley, chives, dill and tarragon, opt for three times the quantity when using fresh.

Harvest herbs just prior to use and in the early morning, if possible, to help maintain freshness and nutrients. To keep them fresh longer, snip off the ends of the stems on the diagonal and put the herbs in a tall glass with one inch of water, like cut flowers. Cover them loosely with a plastic bag to allow for air circulation. Store them in the refrigerator and change the water daily. They should last a week or more stored this way.

When you're ready to use the herbs, rinse them thoroughly under running water. Shake off any remaining moisture and pat dry with a paper towel. Family and friends will appreciate your holiday meal even more knowing some of the ingredients were grown and nurtured by you.



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Take the Bulverde Exit off of Loop 1604. The entrance to Milberger's is next to the Circle K gas station.

## Milberger's Landscape Nursery

Open 9:00 to 6:00 Monday to Saturday  
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Or on the World Wide Web at  
www.milbergernursery.com  
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Our Writers have the answers: **Dr. Jerry Parsons** is a well renown Horticulture Specialist who is retired from the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in San Antonio; **Dr. Calvin Finch** is the retired Director of Water Conservation and Technology at the Texas A&M University System. The Gardening Newsletter for South Central Texas is edited by Marc Hess at mhess@hctc.coop.

# Milberger's Nursery December Features

## VISIT MILBERGER'S Christmas Shop

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## Living Container-Grown Trees Shaped for Christmas



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## WINTER GARDENING EXPERTISE

### The Color of Primula

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

Most Primula grow well in loose garden soil enriched with plenty of humus, especially leaf mold. Additional peat moss is helpful for species that require wetter conditions. Mulch is helpful to reduce heat and preserve moisture in the summer, and provide winter protection. Primulas like moisture. They should be watered regularly and never allowed to dry out. Species that grow naturally in areas with monsoons may require extra watering during their growth period, and limited watering during dormancy.

In most areas, Primula require protection from the hot afternoon sun. Full sunlight is fine in the spring. By midsummer, morning sunlight is fine, but afternoon sun should be filtered. High filtered shade is ideal for most species.

“The color of primula blooms is more intense than pansies. There is nothing subtle about their color; they make me think of the colors that clowns use to paint their faces at the circus.”

~ Dr. Calvin Finch

Primulas can easily be increased by division, either when the plants are overgrown, or just to increase the number of plants in the garden. The best time to divide primroses is late winter or very early spring, just after the plants break dormancy. They can also be divided after blooming. It is not necessary to prune or deadhead Primulas, except to keep the garden tidy.



**Primula**, another name for **primrose**, means “first prime.” It’s a very accurate name for this little shade-loving beauty, since the flowering primrose is one of Mother Nature’s first indicators that spring is a step away from your door. *Primula vulgaris* grows four to six inches in height and tends to have creamy single flowers centered in a rosette of dark green foliage. It’s a herbaceous perennial that adds bouquets of color to your shade gardens.

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You will find winter blooming plants on sale at Milberger’s Nursery throughout the season. Keep an eye on our web site at [www.milbergernursery.com](http://www.milbergernursery.com) for weekly on-sale items. Our web site will also provide you with many tips and guidelines for gardening, lawn care, tree selection and water gardening in our part of Texas.

## LAWNCARE

# For Less Work, Choose Ground Covers

By Mark Peterson, SAWS Conservation Project Manager

The clear benefit of using ground covers instead of grass is less of everything — less water, less fertilizer, less pesticides and less mowing. It may be time to forget turf and move on to something that's drought hardy, water efficient and environmentally friendly: ground covers.

Ground covers are spreading or mounding plants that cover most or all of the soil surface. These can be simply evergreen or provide seasonal flowers. Most are specific to sun or shade, but some are adaptable to both extremes. You will have a choice of colors and textures for both.

## FOR SHADE CONSIDER

**English ivy** – the classic and still great ground cover for the shade. I prefer the small, variegated variety.

**Dwarf Mexican petunia**, aka 'Katy' petunia – the small perennial with the violet or pink flowers is a common ground cover does best in small, confined beds.

**Ajuga** – this low-growing perennial with blue or purple flowers is perfect for pervious patios and borders along paths.

**Purple oxalis** – my all-time favorite for shade. Features purple foliage and pink flowers, and the only maintenance required is pruning once every five years.



**Monkey grass** is a groundcover that has a lot of different names and a lot of different uses. It is the common name for **liriope** but it is sometimes referred to as **border grass**. In addition, monkey grass is oftentimes used as the common name for a similar plant, **dwarf mondo grass**. You can find it available in 'standard' and 'dwarf' versions, but don't let the names fool you. This evergreen "grass" grows to be four to six inches tall. No mowing, no fertilizer, no pesticide.

## FOR SUN CONSIDER

**Silver ponyfoot** – this South America native loves sun and heat. Excellent for the front yard near the curb and sidewalk or between driveways.

**Skullcap** – there are three different species with

pink, blue, and purple flowers. Mow twice a year at most.

**Santolina** – an extremely drought-tolerant plant that comes in green and gray varieties, both with yellow flowers.

**Prostrate rosemary** – a virtually indestructible perennial that can also be used in the kitchen. The only way to kill it is by watering it, so just don't.

**Damianita** – my favorite native perennial is attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds, but not deer. No water, fertilizer, or pruning required. Just plant, establish and walk away.

## SUN OR SHADE CONSIDER

**Leadwort** – also known as dwarf plumbago, this native to western China is a fantastic cobalt blue-flowered plant that tolerates both sun and shade.

**Purple heart** – a classic and still one of the best, this one is also virtually indestructible.

## WINTER LANDSCAPES

# The Versatility of Hollies

Hollies remind us of the Christmas season. The evergreen holly is considered by many landscape designers the most versatile of the landscape ornamentals. Texas native hollies are highly adaptable as home landscape plants in bush or tree form. In Texas, you will find they are amazingly tolerant of our temperature and soil extremes. You may have noticed how often the most impressive displays you have seen were hollies used in open spaces. That's because crowded plants or plants that are severely fenced-in have less of a chance of being pollinated.

Fortunately, hollies are somewhat promiscuous and do not insist on pollen from a member of their own species. Hollies are so common in our landscapes that a suitable male is probably already within bee range of your garden. If your berry-bearing, female holly grows in an isolated area you may need to plant a male holly nearby.

“The surest way to obtain a berry-bearing holly is to buy one in winter that has berries on it. Winter also is an excellent time to plant hollies and other woody shrubs and trees. There also are named varieties that all are female, so all plants of that variety produce berries.”

Hollies come in a wide array of sizes and textures, and they are adaptable to a range of different sun exposures, making them truly a “go-to” plant for challenging areas where other plants may be difficult to grow. There are several choices that you will find at Milberger's Nursery.

**‘Rotunda’ Chinese Holly** is one of the most satisfactory shrubs available. ‘Rotunda’ will tolerate hot, dry locations that would injure other shrubs. It is viciously thorny and sterile (no berries).



Come winter when the **Possum Haw hollies** drop their leaves, their tiny red berries add colorful interest to what might otherwise be a drab winter garden. Like other hollies, the leaves are thick and glossy during the growing season, and these turn yellow in the fall, before they are dropped. The berries are important winter food source for birds.

**Dwarf Yaupon Holly** is one of the finest hollies available for low hedges. Unlike its parents, this selection is compact and slow-growing. They are very tough ornamentals that will tolerate hot, dry locations.

**Dwarf Burford Holly** has glossy dark green leaves of Yaupon Hollies but are smaller, and growth rate is slower. Dwarf Burford will grow to a height of at least five to six feet if not pruned heavily.

At Milberger's Nursery you will find the winter blooming plants that will thrive in your landscape. Visit us for your holiday shopping where you will find beautiful wreaths, garland, holiday decorations and the perfect gift for the gardeners on your shopping list.

## CHRISTMAS TREES

# Pick Out Your Best Tree Ever

Picking out a Christmas tree is one of the most classic Christmas traditions there is. Each tree species is a little different, so to find the best Christmas tree for your family, you need to match it to the needs and wants of your household. For example, if you have children, you might lean toward pines or firs with soft needles instead of spruce trees, which have sharp needles that can hurt when you step on them.

Check the Tree's Freshness. The trunk should have a slight stickiness to it. Bend a needle in half with your fingers; fresh firs should snap, while fresh pines bend and should not break. Look for even coloration – greener is better

To make sure the needles are secure, gently grab the inside of a branch and pull your hand toward you. The needles should stay on the tree. Alternatively, gently tap the cut end of a tree on the ground; if a few needles fall off, it should be fine. If a lot of needles fall off, keep searching for a different tree.

When you get home cut about a half inch from the bottom. The fresh cut will absorb more water so your tree holds on to its needles and keeps its color. Keep the water in your tree stand filled all the time. You may need to add water two or even three times the first few days.



At Milberger's Nursery you will find the most reliable selection of Christmas trees. All of the trees on our Christmas tree lot have been selected for their excellent needle retention and shape. Every tree is fresh cut and displayed in water to maintain superior freshness. Trees range from 5 feet to 12 feet tall.

**The Nordman fir** is Europe's Christmas tree of choice because of its deep rich color, dense foliage, rounded needles, and light fragrance. Nordman firs are very full in terms of both branches and foliage. The needles display a dark, green, glossy upper-surface with a contrasting silvery white under-surface. The needles are flat with rounded tips, and grow in symmetrical rows circling around the branch. The Nordman fir has excellent needle retention that makes it a great choice for any climate. Its light scent makes it a desirable species for consumers with allergies.

**The Fraser fir** is an elegant tree. Its fragrance, full shape, strong branches, unique coloring and ability to retain its needles throughout the holiday season make it an excellent choice for a Christmas tree. Strong branches that support heavier decorations curve slightly upwards. Needles are up to one inch in length and

flat. The contrasting color of the upper and lower sides of the branch gives this tree a wintry, frosted appearance. Fraser fir has a very pleasant woody scent.

**The Noble fir** has long been considered the "King" of Christmas trees. Its majestic beauty, rich fragrance and perfectly-spaced branches make it a top seller. The Noble fir has excellent needle retention when properly cared for. A good Noble fir should have a very well-shaped conical form, with regularly-spaced branches and a smooth taper from bottom to top.

## DECEMBER GARDENING TIPS

# End of the Year Pruning and Planting

By Dr. Jerry Parsons

**In your Garden Beds:** Plant pansies, the premier color plant for the winter here in South Texas. They're hardy, will bloom over a long season, and come in a wide array of colors. You can also plant flowering kale, Dianthus, calendula, viola, Johnny jump-ups, alyssum, and snapdragons.

**Plant** December is a good month to plant trees and shrubs. This is a good time to move trees and shrubs as well. Planting now gives the plant time to establish its root system before the shoot growth develops in the spring. Also, usually little supplemental watering is required through the winter. Look around at the fall color and see which plants you would like to add to your landscape. Make certain your final choices are from the list of recommended trees and shrubs for this area found on our web site.

**Prune** lantana, mallow hibiscus, Esperanza and other cold sensitive plants. Cut them back severely – to the ground. Over-plant the cut-back perennial area with winter annuals such as pansies, Johnny-jump-ups and dianthus (pinks), larkspur or bluebonnets rather than looking at the barren bed all winter. The lantana will come back next spring in May to provide beauty during the hottest part

of the summer. Most container plants react to the season by reducing growth rates. Cut back on the water and fertilizer until next spring.

**Prune:** Your trees and shrubs. If you have oak trees in need of pruning, begin now. It is especially critical in areas where the oak wilt fungus is a problem. Apply horticultural tree wound dressing on all oak cuts. Prune out dead, damaged or diseased wood from trees and shrubs. Avoid topping or dehorning.

**Lawn Care:** If you have procrastinated the application of the most important lawn fertilization of the year – the application of a “Winterizer” fertilizer to condition the grass for winter survival – do it now.

**Odd Jobs:** Do not allow heavy accumulations of leaves to pile up on the lawn area. If they get wet and pack together, the grass can be damaged. It is best to rake leaves or pick them up with a mower and bagger and place them in a compost pile or spread them over the garden area and work them into the soil. Add additional fertilizer to assist in decomposition.

For more detailed and complete Gardening Tips for this month visit [www.MilbergerNursery.com](http://www.MilbergerNursery.com).

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## Christmas Trees

At Milberger's you will find only the most reliable selection of fresh cut trees, displayed and kept in water. Choose from Noble firs, Nordman firs and Fraser firs.



**Christmas cacti** are a very popular houseplant full of buds and blooms. They produce colorful, tubular flowers in pink or lilac colors that bloom for a long time. Unlike many other cacti, Christmas cacti are not from arid environments. In their natural habitat you will find them in the tree branches of the Brazilian rain forest. They like a humid climate, not a dry one, so it's important to water Christmas cacti more regularly than most succulents. They are perfect for holiday decoration and make an excellent gift.