

# K-STATE

Research and Extension

Butler County

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# The Grapevine

## Picking the Perfect Poinsettia

Poinsettias are filling the stores in the days after Thanksgiving. These colorful plants are the most popular holiday plants in the United States. How do you pick the perfect poinsettia? Perhaps the most important part to start with is how do you tell an immature flower from a mature to an over-mature flower. Because, if you're shopping on December 1 to decorate your house for the holidays, it's important to know. The colorful "petals" of the poinsettia are bracts and will last for several months. But they're not the true flower. The true flower is in the middle. It's the central part of the flower. You'll see these ball-like structures, the cyathia, and that's the true flower.

The photo below is a picture of an immature flower. So, if I'm shopping around the first of December, or perhaps the 10th of December, that's the stage at which you want to purchase them. However, if it's later, closer to Christmas, the ideal stage is after those have opened and all the reproductive parts are apparent, as in this flower. You can see that these are much larger, the male structures are apparent, and the pollen can be seen. This is at the perfect stage if you're buying it the week before Christmas. Now, the size of the flower is not an indicator of maturity, and these are really bracts. It's important to know this is not the flower. It's just a modified, colorful leaf that's there to attract the insects to pollinate the true flower, which is the center part. Happy Growing!!!



## Gifts for Gardeners

Last month, I sent out a survey asking for recommendations for products, tools, and other items that you love to use in your garden. Thank you to everyone who took the time to fill out the survey and give me ideas for this week's Grapevine. I have had so much fun looking into the different products, and I had so many that I couldn't use all of them in this article, so I'm saving some for future "Gifts for Gardeners" articles. These products are based on recommendations provided by gardeners and are not specifically endorsed by K-State Extension. I love the diversity of items recommended this year and I had a hard time narrowing the list down to ten items. I hope that you can find the perfect gift for the gardener in your life or maybe your partner can use this list to find the perfect gift for you! If you don't see your recommendation this year it likely will show up on a list in the future!

- Hori Hori Knife-The most recommended product in this year's survey was the Hori Hori Knife. This versatile product is a unique mix between a trowel, a saw, and a knife. The blade is serrated on one side and can be used to cut roots, dig and divide plants, remove weeds, and the measurement markings make it easy to plant bulbs.
- Heavy Duty Wagon- Tied for the second most recommended item in this year's survey is a heavy-duty wagon to use around your garden. The gardeners loved it for its usefulness in moving things around, hauling bags of leaves, moving plants, holding tools, and reducing the amount of moving heavy items the gardeners needed to do. There are a variety of different ones on the market depending on your price point and the size of the wagon you need.
- Waterproof, Reusable Planting Mat- Tied as the second most recommended item are transplanting mats. I have had several of these over the years, and have loved them for making clean-up easier. In our household, I have used my mats for transplanting plants, carving pumpkins, and any activity that might make a mess. There are a variety of different brands, colors, and sizes of these transplanting mats, but most have corners that snap together to keep the dirt from spilling while you are working.
- Gift Cards- The next item on our survey is the ever-popular gift card to a local garden center or their favorite online garden store. This is the perfect gift for the person who has everything or the person who is hard to shop for.
- We the Wild Plant Care- This company and its organic product line offer something for everyone. The products are all made in the United States including their compostable sticky traps. The website states that their foolproof formulas are packed full of beneficial bacteria and fungi to help your houseplants thrive like they would in nature! Rely on us for strong roots, vigorous growth, and resilient houseplants through every season, whether you're a beginner or an expert. If you are looking for a new line of fertilizers, insecticides, and general plant care check them out for the houseplant enthusiast in your life. Their website is: <https://wethewild.us/>
- Winter Gardening Gloves- These are the perfect gift for the gardener who loves to be outdoors in any weather. These gloves have an insulated shell to keep hands warm in colder weather and a smooth Nitrile coating provides excellent grip and protection. These gloves can be found at Home Depot in a package of three pairs of gloves. They do only come in large or extra-large sizes. You can also find similar gloves at other online retailers if you need smaller sizes.



- **Seed Saving Kits-** This is the perfect gift for the gardener in your life who would like to start saving seeds or has been saving seeds for years. There are a variety of different seed-saving kits you can purchase. The typical kit comes with a box or container to hold the packages of seeds in and envelopes or vials to save the seeds in that can be labeled with what is in them and the date. Some kits also include things such as funnels to make it easier to store the seed, markers for planting seeds next year and instructions for how to save different types of seeds. These kits can be perfect for the gardener who likes to experiment and try different things in their garden.



- **Bonide Systemic Insecticide Granules-** This product is one I have used and have had success with. Bonide Systemic Houseplant Insect Control provides insect control for up to 8 weeks. Protects plants from aphids, whiteflies, and other listed insects. I have enjoyed this product because it's easy to find locally and effectively controls many houseplant pests. It makes an excellent stocking stuffer idea.

- **Bee and Bat Houses-** Does your gardener love wildlife in their garden? Bee and bat houses are perfect for the gardener who wants to bring more wildlife and native bees into their gardens. There are a variety of different styles and brands out there. When looking into purchasing a bat house, look for ones meet the criteria recommended by Bat Conservation International in regards to size and shape. Those houses have the best cavity sizes for the types of bats in our area. Bee houses can easily be found in a variety of stores and as long as they provide a mix of different sizes of holes and different materials there isn't one bee house that is better than others.



- **SuperThrive-** This product was recommended by houseplant lovers on our survey and in multiple plant groups. Started in a three-car garage in 1939, SUPERthrive has had a fabulous journey few products can match. SuperThrive is a unique vitamin solution of non-toxic ingredients that restores plant vigor, reduces transplant shock, and says it promotes chemical balance in houseplants.

- **Portable Umbrella with Stand-** Who am I kidding, I couldn't narrow it down to just ten items, so here is a bonus one. This portable umbrella comes with a three-legged stand or an anchor for stability depending on the brand. The outdoor umbrella blocks 98% UVA and UVB rays to keep you cool in the shade. The tilt feature allows you to adjust the angle with a push button for optimal shade all day long. This umbrella is lightweight and easy to move around your garden to provide shade in those sunny places. [The gardener recommended the Ammsun brand which can be found at this link.](#)



## Video of the Week- DIY Holiday Gift- Plants with Flair

Flowering plants can make great gifts for the holidays. You can create fun styles with a variety of plants and accessories. This segment provides tips on how to dress up an arrangement with artistic flair. Watch here:

[https://youtu.be/YovL\\_yW5Rmo?si=SOTChwS6u8cD9TdH](https://youtu.be/YovL_yW5Rmo?si=SOTChwS6u8cD9TdH)

## Upcoming Events

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### Garden Hour Webinars:

December 4<sup>th</sup>- Home Hydroponics

January 8<sup>th</sup>- A Beginners Guide to Gardening in Kansas

### Upcoming Events:

February 8<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 am  
Sustainable Landscaping with Rain Barrel Clinic at Andover Library

February 12<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm  
Seed Starting Success at the Bradford Memorial Library

February 13<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm  
Winter Blues and Winter Greens at the Andover Library

February 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9 am  
Sustainable Landscaping with Rain Barrel Clinic at Butler Community Building

## December Garden Hour

### *Vegetables and Fruits*

- Store leftover seeds and a cool, dry location, for example, in a sealed jar placed in the refrigerator.
- Check vegetables in storage for spoilage.
- Mulch strawberries for winter protection.
- Clean and oil garden hand tools for winter.

### *Flowers*

- Mulch roses by mounding soil 6 to 8 inches deep over the plants to protect the graft.
- Mulch perennial beds with 2 to 4 inches of straw, shredded leaves, or other lightweight material.
- Cut tall hybrid tea roses back to 18 to 24 inches to reduce wind whipping and plant damage.
- Continue to plant spring flowering bulbs until the ground is frozen. Water and mulch.
- Give plants or gift certificates as holiday gifts for gardening friends.
- Empty decorative pots and containers. Store inside or decorate for winter.

### *Lawns*

- Pick up fallen leaves, limbs, and other debris from lawn to prevent suffocation of the turf during winter.
- Store any leftover lawn fertilizers in dry location and out of reach of children and pets.
- Store pesticides in a cool (not freezing) dry location for winter, out of reach of children and pets.

### *Trees and Shrubs*

- Keep heavy snowfall from limbs of trees and shrubs by lightly shaking to avoid damage.
- To prevent breakage, avoid shoveling snow onto trees and shrubs.
- Check and protect the trunks of young trees and branches of shrubs for rabbit damage.
- Living Christmas trees are special. Leave them in your home for no longer than one week, then acclimate to the outdoors and plant them.
- Prune damaged branches throughout the winter months.
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs to prevent dry soil conditions.
- Mulch roots of tender shrubs such as azaleas and rhododendrons to keep vigorous during winter.
- Prune branches of junipers, pines, and hollies to use as holiday decorations.

### *Miscellaneous*

- Start planning for next year by making notes and preparing orders.
- Turn compost pile to encourage winter breakdown.

