

A POSY PICKER'S PAPER

New Meadows Garden Club

Topsfield, Massachusetts

January 15th through February 26, 2019

The objectives of the New Meadows Garden Club shall be to foster knowledge of home gardening, decorative arrangements and an interest in civic projects.

Happy New Year to one and all!

There is no regular membership meeting scheduled for January.

February 2



It's almost time for Groundhog Day, once again! Groundhog Day marks the midpoint between the Winter Solstice in December and the Spring Equinox in March, and has its roots in the ancient Christian tradition of Candlemas, celebrated on the same day. Like some other Christian traditions, Candlemas draws some of its elements from Paganism. On Candlemas, the Church would bless and distribute candles needed for the winter. Some folks believed that

the blessing of the candles somehow predicted how long and cold the winter would be. "If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, winter will have another fight. If Candlemas Day brings cloud and rain, winter won't come again." Germans expanded on this concept by selecting badgers as a means to predict the weather. German settlers in Pennsylvania continued the tradition, but finding no badgers, instead selected groundhogs, which were plentiful! Today, this tradition has grown into fun winter festivals, with Punxsutawney Phil leading the pack. Will there be six more weeks of winter? We'll see, prediction or not!

February 19

Our next board meeting will be held at the Topsfield Library Meeting Room at 10 am.

February 26



Our February regular membership meeting will a Mid-Winter Social, to be held beginning at 12 pm at the new home of Horticulture Co-Chair, Donna Ryan. She, and her Co-Chair, Cheryl Connors, are planning a nice get-together, including delicious treats and a chance for members to visit with one another and hopefully exchange some great gardening tips! Please note that this is a change in location from that printed in our program books!

► If you plan to attend, please RSVP to Donna by February 15th! Parking is limited, so please carpool, if you can!

Hostesses: Claudette Poor and Penny Rogers



Is your Thanksgiving Cactus pretending to be a Christmas Cactus? Or is your Christmas Cactus pretending to be an Easter Cactus? Confused? The mystery is solved in this month's Green Thumb Corner!

...more news on the following page...

NOTES



Coming soon!

► **Wednesday, May 22, 2019**— Mark your calendars for a very special club meeting, not to be missed! Our Conservation/Environment Committee is planning a very special tour of the gardens at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. A Landscape Architecture staff member at the museum will be our speaker. There will be time for additional browsing and perhaps some lunch after the tour. Admission to the museum is \$15 for seniors. Please note that passes available at our local libraries will not be able to be used for admission to this special program. The committee is currently trying to arrange for transportation to the museum, which will be at additional cost to those attending. Members are also free to provide their own transportation that day. ► Because there is a limit to the number of members (25) who may participate in the tour, and for the purposes of arranging transportation, it is important to let Penny Rogers know by February 15th whether you will be attending!

Librarian/Properties Chair, Lorraine Erickson is taking inventory!
If you are currently in the possession of or storing property that belongs to our club, please contact Lorraine as soon as possible with details so that she can update her inventory files. Thanks so much!



Helpful Tips

Here's a tip from our Garden Therapy Committee:

Instead of stockpiling those Boxwood Tree bows and other decorations distributed by our club at our annual Boxwood Tree Workshop for the Topsfield Council on Aging, why not bring them with you to our next Boxwood Tree Workshop in December? Less clutter in your home is good, right?

► *Do you still have your live Christmas tree around somewhere? Why not recycle it into a snacking station for birds with garlands made of peanuts, cranberries, popcorn and fruits? Or, how about cutting branches from the tree to provide cover from freezing and thawing for the perennials in your garden? ♥*

...more news on the following page...



...Bits and pieces...

Celebrating the Holidays New Meadows Garden Club style!



*Topsfield Town Library
Decorations*



Steward School Urns



*The Garden Therapy Committee
and helpers create boxwood
trees with the Topsfield Council
On Aging*



*Our club's Holiday Social
and Yankee Swap*



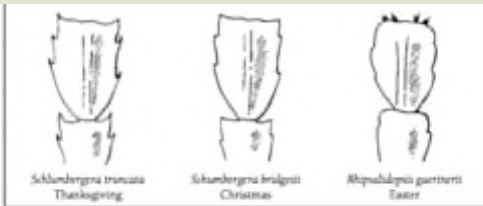
...Green Thumb Corner follows...

Green Thumb Corner

So, you have this plant, as many of us do, that you have always called a "**Christmas Cactus**", but somehow or other, it doesn't quite know that it is supposed to bloom at Christmas time, and instead blooms while you are preparing your



Thanksgiving dinner! Or worse yet, maybe it doesn't bloom at all! What to do...give it a good talking to or threaten to heave it into your compost pile? Stop right there! Here's Google to the rescue. **First, it is only fair to start with the "dry stuff."** A botanist, explorer and plant collector named Allan Cunningham was the first to collect and document Christmas Cactus during an expedition to the rainforest in Brazil in the early 19th century. These plants are far different from the spiny cactus plants found in the desert. Instead, they are forest cactus, attaching themselves to trees in moist woodlands and jungles. They are more similar to succulent cacti. This is important to note since the clues for making these plants happy in your home become more obvious.




Christmas Cactus belongs to the genus *Schlumbergera* as does another variety, which we call Thanksgiving Cactus. These two plants are not identical, hence their natural habit to bloom at different times. Thanksgiving Cactus, on the far left, has pointed teeth on its leaf margins and blooms in late fall. Christmas Cactus, in the middle, has more rounded teeth and blooms a month later. Easter Cactus on the far right is a cousin to the Christmas and Thanksgiving Cactus plants and belongs to the genus *Hatiora*. They are native to Brazil's natural forests

rather than rainforest, and therefore prefer drier conditions than their cousins. Easter Cactus has fibrous hairs on its stem segments and in its stem joints, and blooms late winter to early spring, around Easter time. I just did a quick inspection of my plants, and it looks like I have both Christmas and Thanksgiving Cactus, but no Easter variety. Collectively, these three types of cactus plants are called Holiday Cactus, not for the sake of political correctness, which might be your guess with the way things are going these days, but rather for the time of year they typically bloom! That's all the dry stuff for today. Got it all down?

Now for the fun of choosing and taking care of your Holiday Cactus, and getting them to bloom year after year! Since Holiday Cactus come in many colors, there is bound to be at least one out there to strike your fancy. The plants at your garden center will usually be in bloom, so the choice between white, pink, red, salmon-orange and red will be difficult. You might find yourself purchasing more than one! Older plants may be offered in hanging baskets, since their stems are longer and more arching. In keeping with their native habitats, they should be planted in highly organic, well-draining soils,

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rather than heavy native or commercial potting soils. Even though these plants are not fond of extreme heat, they are tropical, so if you purchase your plant during cold winter months, be sure to provide some protection on its trip home! Once home, it will enjoy a sunny window indoors, which is comparable to bright shade outside. But, be careful to avoid drafty spots. Holiday Cactus tolerate cool indoor temperatures, but like daytime temperatures 70 or above. They definitely aren't too happy if temperatures dip below 50 degrees. I guess we wouldn't be either! Water sparingly when the top inch of soil feels dry. Holiday Cactus can be grown outdoors, but only in growing zones 9 to 11. My growing zone here in Boxford is 6a, and some of you closer to the water may be in 6b. So we do not have the luxury of growing our Holiday Cactus outside, except in the summer months. Repotting may be necessary when the plant becomes pot-bound or the soil appears to be depleted of nutrients. This is best done in spring. Buds dropping? Probable causes are over-watering, exposure to cold drafts or too close to heat sources and insufficient potash in the soil!

While these plants are long-lived and do seem to thrive on benign neglect, **here are some monthly tips to help your Holiday Cactus thrive and shower you with blooms:**

January—If you've received your plant as a gift or recently purchased one, let your plant rest for about a month after blooming. Keep it in indirect light and in a cool spot, watering only sparingly until you see new growth emerge.

February—If your plant needs to be repotted, the ideal time is between February and April.

March—When you see new growth, you can pinch or prune your plant, if needed.

April to September—This is the growing season for Holiday Cactus. It's a good time to feed your plant with an all-purpose plant food every few weeks. If you are tempted to let your plant summer outside, be sure to move it to a cool and shady spot. Water when the top inch feels dry, without soaking the plant or leaving it standing in water.

September to October—Now this is a very critical time if you want your plant to bloom and hopefully at its proper time! Holiday Cactus are photoperiodic, which means that they measure the length of the dark period they are exposed to. The hormone in the plant, which initiates flower bud formation, is destroyed by light, so it is essential that the plant be in darkness at night. Here's what to do...beginning in September, put your plant in a cool room with indirect bright light for 10 to 12 hours a day and total darkness for 12-14 hours. I find that the easiest way to accomplish this is to put the plant in a room that I don't use at night and is not lit. Holiday Cactus need these conditions for 6 to 8 weeks to ensure that the flower buds will form. During this period, stop fertilizing and keep the soil only barely moist.

November to December—Once your plant is full of those lovely flower buds, you can move the plant to a room that is lit at night, if you wish. The cooler the location, the longer your blooms will last! Do resume normal watering.

And, you can very easily propagate your Holiday Cactus to make more plants for yourself or to share with friends! Here's how: bury 3-segment-long stem sections in well-drained potting soil. Water sparingly and they should take root in about 4 weeks!

Follow these easy steps, and you will become Holiday Cactus Experts!