

THE GREENE COUNTY EXTENSION HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER



November 2011

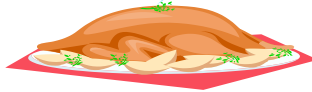
What's Inside:

- Preparing Your Thanksgiving Turkey
- Let Kids Help Make Dough Ornaments & Decorations
- Holiday Spending Tips
- Traditional Holiday Plant History

PREPARING YOUR THANKSGIVING TURKEY

It is hard to believe Thanksgiving is just around the corner. If you are like my family, we have already determined where we will gather as a family and who will cook the turkey. This year, my mother in law is cooking the bird and other family members and I will just bring a few side dishes. The meal will be great but the time we spend together as a family will be priceless.

As you begin to prepare for the upcoming holiday season, I hope you will find this information helpful.



HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER

The purpose of a holiday newsletter is to keep friends and family updated on the events in our County Extension family and to share holiday tips across the miles.



SELECTING A TURKEY

The first decision you need to make is whether you will purchase a fresh or frozen turkey. A fresh turkey is more convenient because it can be purchased and prepared at the last minute. However, fresh turkeys often must be ordered in advance to assure their availability.

Fresh turkeys always require special handling, so usually they are more expensive. The advantage of the frozen bird is that it can be bought in advance. This allows you the opportunity to purchase a turkey when it is on sale.

After you have decided on the turkey, you will need to decide how large a

turkey you will need. If you are planning to have leftovers, make sure to purchase one pound of turkey per person. If you do not want any leftover turkey at your house, or are purchasing a bone-in turkey breast, plan on three quarters of a pound per person. When buying boneless turkey breast, look for a turkey that will provide one half pound of turkey per person. In addition to pounds, the size of a turkey can also be classified by the terms "hen" or "Tom," which means Tom turkeys are the larger turkeys and hens are the smaller ones.

Also on the package might be the terms "basted" or "self-basting." A turkey containing either of these terms means it has been injected with some products you may have used to baste the turkey. Usually butter, other types of fat, broth, spices, or seasonings are injected into the turkey. Each manufacturer may use different ingredients, so be sure to read the label to determine which ingredients were used on your bird.

STORING AND THAWING TURKEY

A fresh turkey should be purchased no more than three days prior to preparation and should be refrigerator at a temperature of 40°F or below. Frozen turkey should be kept in a freezer at 0°F or below until it's time to thaw. The safest way for thawing a frozen turkey is in the refrigerator. You will need to allow one day of thawing for every five pounds of turkey. To thaw the turkey faster, use cold water bath. When using a cold water bath, keep the turkey wrapped during the process and completely

submerge the turkey in cold water. Change the water every thirty minutes. For every pound of turkey to thaw, you will need to allow thirty minutes in the cold bath. It will take approximately four hours to thaw an eight pound turkey in cold water.

COOKING STUFFING

The safest method for cooking the stuffing is in a casserole dish. If you do choose to stuff your turkey, take the proper safety precautions. Make the stuffing right before placing it in the turkey. Stuff the turkey loosely. If too much stuffing is put inside the turkey, it is difficult for the stuffing to reach the proper cooking temperature of 165°F which increases the potential for food borne illness. Be sure to use a meat thermometer to ensure the stuffing reaches 165°F.

COOKING TURKEY

There are many ways you can cook your turkey: roasting, smoking, frying and even microwaving. No matter which method you use to prepare the turkey, the first thing to do is remove the package from the outside of the turkey and then remove the neck and giblets from the inside of the turkey's cavities. Giblets are the liver and heart of the turkey and are cooked separately and used for flavoring the stuffing or gravy. The turkey should then be rinsed inside and out with cold water and patted dry.

ROASTING

Roasting the turkey is the most common method of preparation. You'll end up with a golden brown juicy turkey and your house will smell wonderful during the process. To roast a turkey, place it breast side up on a rack in a shallow pan. Insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh. Rub the skin with oil to prevent drying. This also helps the turkey to brown. Basting a turkey typically isn't necessary because the liquid only penetrates about 1/8 to 1/4 of an inch.

Place the turkey in a preheated 325°F oven and cook until the meat thermometer inserted into the innermost part of the thigh or breast should read a minimum of 165°F, meaning the turkey is safe to eat. However, the turkey can be cooked to higher temperatures, such as 180-185°F in the thigh or 170-175°F at the breast, depending on your preference. This allows for the juices in the meat to settle and redistribute. The juices should run clear when the turkey is pierced with a fork. Once the turkey has reached the proper temperature, remove it from the oven and let it sit for 20 minutes. This allows the juices in the meat to settle and redistribute.

If the turkey starts to get too brown during the cooking process, make an aluminum foil "tent" over the bird to prevent further browning. Once the turkey has reached the proper temperature, remove it from the oven and let it sit for 20 minutes.

Approximate times for roasting are:

<u>Size of Turkey</u>	<u>Unstuffed</u>	<u>Stuffed</u>
8-12 lbs	2 ¾ - 3 hrs	3 - 3 ½ hrs
12-14 lbs	3 - 3 ¾ hrs	3 ½ - 4 hrs
14-18 lbs	3 ¾ - 4 ¼ hrs	4 - 4 ¼ hrs
18-20 lbs	4 ¼ - 4 ½ hrs	4 ¼ - 4 ¾ hrs
20-24 lbs	4 ½ - 5 hrs	4 ¾ - 5 ¼ hrs

As I mentioned above, turkeys can also be smoked or fried. A benefit of smoking or frying a turkey is that the oven is left available to cook other dishes. Both frying and smoking result in a tasty turkey, but you must take care to assure a safe product.

LET KIDS HELP MAKE DOUGH ORNAMENTS AND DECORATIONS

Making dough ornaments or decorations can be a fun activity for moms and their children during the holidays. Dough creations can be made easily by using some common household items such as flour, water, salt, white glue and shampoo. Remember to caution children that dough decorations are not to be eaten and are only for decoration. Here are three recipes for making dough ornaments.

Bread Dough

1 cup salt
2 cups flour
1 cup water

Mix flour and salt in a bowl. Add water, a little at a time. Knead dough 7 to 10 minutes until smooth and pliable. Tint after kneading if desired. Bake ornaments at 325 degrees for 30 minutes or until hard.

Glue Dough

¾ cup flour
¼ cup white glue

¼ cup shampoo

Mix and knead well. Shape into desired ornaments. Let ornaments air dry then paint.

Play Clay

2 cups baking soda (1 pound)

1 cup cornstarch

1 ¼ cups cold water

Mix baking soda and corn starch in a pan. Add water. Cook over medium heat until the mixture looks like creamed potatoes. Pour on a plate and cover with a cloth until cool. Knead and shape ornaments. Let air dry then paint.

For all recipes, roll dough on waxed paper until about ¼ inch thick. Use a nail or drinking straw to make a hole in the top of the ornament.

Ornaments can be made three dimensional by forming small pieces of dough into various shapes and attaching them together before air drying. Squeeze dough through a garlic press to make hair, etc. If you want to tint dough, tint or paint ornaments with food coloring before baking or drying. Acrylic paints can be used after the ornaments are baked or dried.

Finish each ornament by painting it with a coat of clear varnish, polyurethane or clear nail polish. This coating will protect dough from moisture.

After the holidays, wrap each ornament with tissue paper and stack lightly in an appropriate sized box lined with tissue paper. The tissue

paper will help protect the ornaments from breakage and bugs while in storage.

HOLIDAY SPENDING TIPS

Christmas is almost here. Are you financially ready? Lovie Burrell Parks, Regional Extension Agent with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System offers these tips from the Consumer Credit Counseling Service in Atlanta.

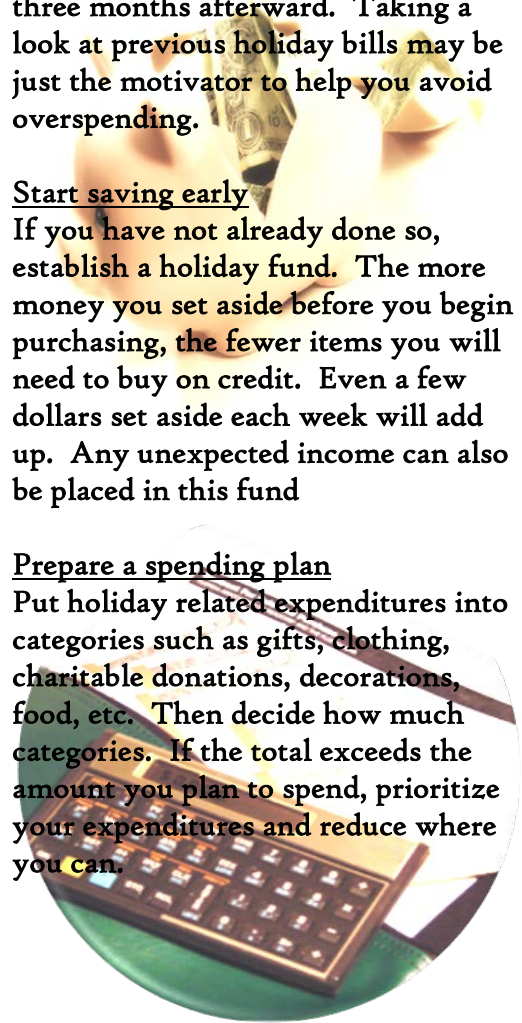
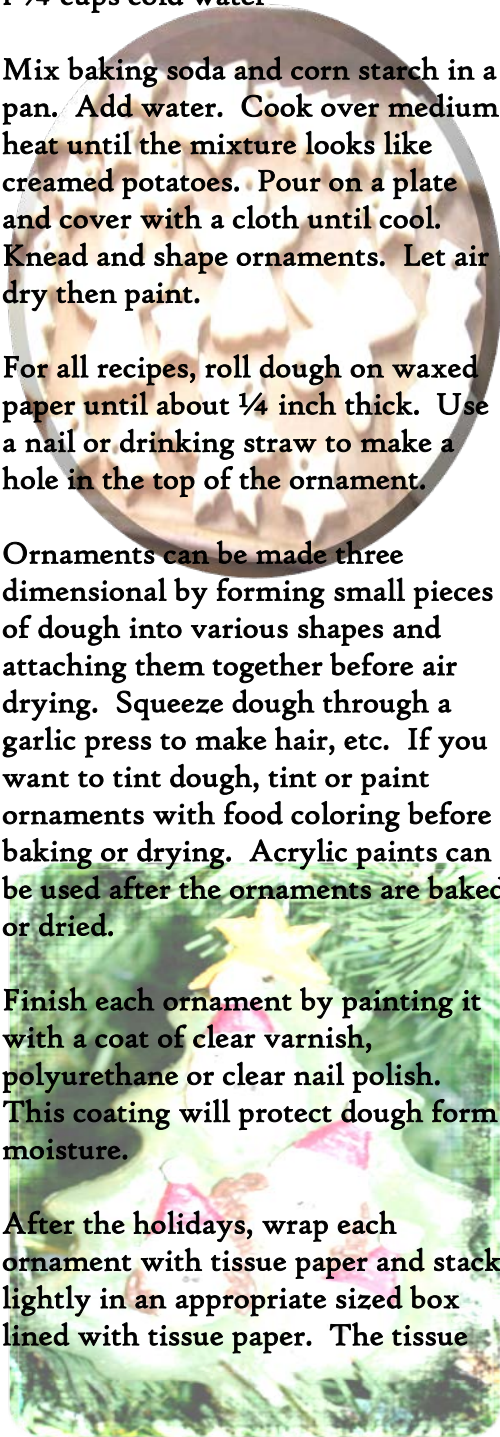
Evaluate how much money to spend
Come up with an amount for holiday spending that you can afford either by saving the cash before the holidays or just paying off the debt within three months afterward. Taking a look at previous holiday bills may be just the motivator to help you avoid overspending.

Start saving early

If you have not already done so, establish a holiday fund. The more money you set aside before you begin purchasing, the fewer items you will need to buy on credit. Even a few dollars set aside each week will add up. Any unexpected income can also be placed in this fund

Prepare a spending plan

Put holiday related expenditures into categories such as gifts, clothing, charitable donations, decorations, food, etc. Then decide how much categories. If the total exceeds the amount you plan to spend, prioritize your expenditures and reduce where you can.



Start thinking of appropriate gifts

Putting some fore thought into your gift giving can eliminate much of the overspending that often accompanies a last-minute rush. Make a list of individuals to whom you want to give a gift. When you an idea about what to buy them, write it down, including the approximate cost of the gift.

Stay within your spending limits

Set a spending limit for each person on your list. Carry your gift list with you so you can keep track of the purchases. You can avoid unmanageable bills by not exceeding these limits. When you have finished shopping, STOP.

Beware of “buy now, pay later” offers

Sure, it sounds appealing, but if you can't afford an item in December, will you be able to in March?

Think twice before you buy

Before buying a gift, ask yourself if the gift will be appropriate for the recipient and within the price range. If not, do not buy the gift, particularly if you will have to charge the purchase. Watch the extra impulse gifts; the prices can add up quickly. Plan to pay your credit card purchases within 90 days. A \$20 sweater could end up costing you \$30.

Put off some gift giving until after the holidays

You may agree in advance with family and friends to exchange gifts after the holidays. This way, you can take advantage of the after-Christmas sales, plus you can shop in a more leisurely manner.

TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY PLANT HISTORY

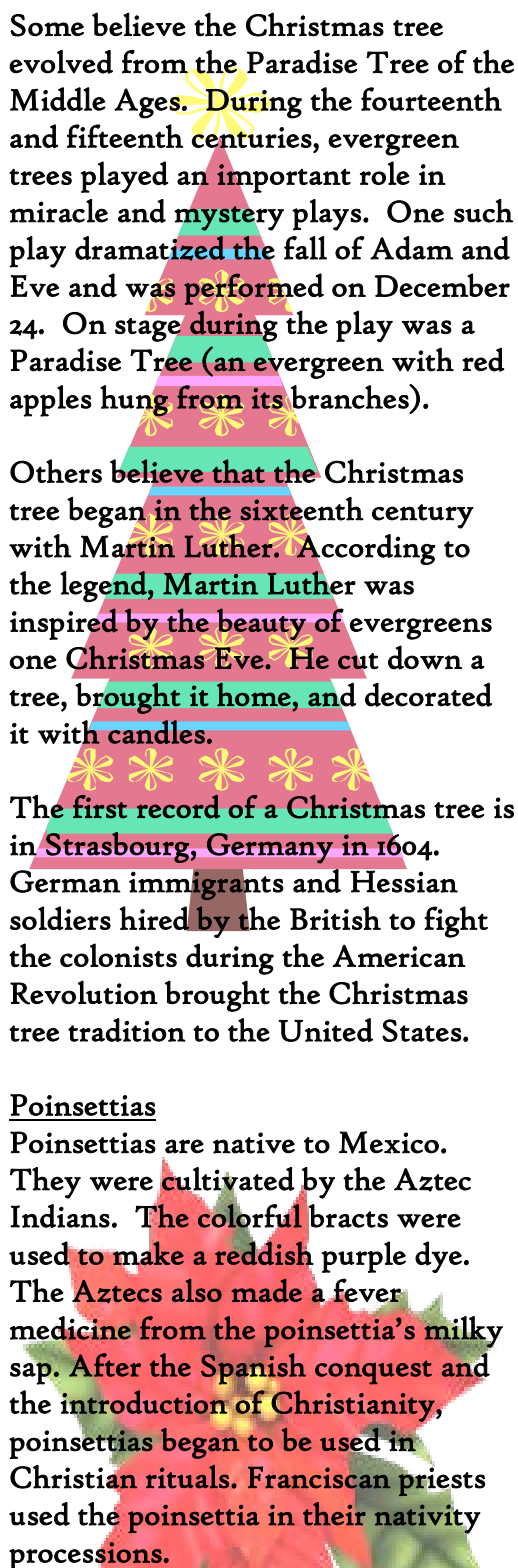
Have you ever wondered why we use a tree as a part of our Christmas tradition? Well, there are many traditions that involve plants as a part of the holidays.

Evergreen trees, poinsettias, hollies and mistletoe are the plants most talked about relating to the holiday season. All of these plants played important roles in old legends and rituals, which evolved into traditions associated with the Christmas season.

The following is information I gleaned from Richard Jauron, horticulturist at Iowa State. While you can find more information on each topic in other sources, I feel his explanations are very good.

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is a tradition which began in Germany in the seventeenth century. There are several legends concerning the origin on the Christmas tree. Historians do know that the primitive cultures of northern Europe believed that evergreen trees possessed godlike powers. The evergreen tree also symbolized immortality. The Germanic peoples would bring evergreen boughs into their homes during winter to insure the protection of the home and the return of life to the snow-covered forest. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, eventually the evergreen tree was transformed into a Christian symbol.



Some believe the Christmas tree evolved from the Paradise Tree of the Middle Ages. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, evergreen trees played an important role in miracle and mystery plays. One such play dramatized the fall of Adam and Eve and was performed on December 24. On stage during the play was a Paradise Tree (an evergreen with red apples hung from its branches).

Others believe that the Christmas tree began in the sixteenth century with Martin Luther. According to the legend, Martin Luther was inspired by the beauty of evergreens one Christmas Eve. He cut down a tree, brought it home, and decorated it with candles.

The first record of a Christmas tree is in Strasbourg, Germany in 1604. German immigrants and Hessian soldiers hired by the British to fight the colonists during the American Revolution brought the Christmas tree tradition to the United States.

Poinsettias

Poinsettias are native to Mexico. They were cultivated by the Aztec Indians. The colorful bracts were used to make a reddish purple dye. The Aztecs also made a fever medicine from the poinsettia's milky sap. After the Spanish conquest and the introduction of Christianity, poinsettias began to be used in Christian rituals. Franciscan priests used the poinsettia in their nativity processions.

Poinsettias were first introduced into the United States by Joel Robert Poinsett, the first U.S. Ambassador

to Mexico. Poinsett had plants sent to his home in South Carolina. He then distributed plants to horticultural friends and botanical gardens. The Ecke family of California has been instrumental in the development of today's poinsettia.

Initially poinsettias lasted only a few days in the home. All had red bracts. Today's varieties are more compact, durable, and long-lasting. Red, pink, white, gold, marbled, and variegated varieties are now available.

Mistletoe

Mistletoe is a semi-parasitic plant with small, leathery leaves and small, white berries. Mistletoe plants manufacture their own food, but must obtain water and minerals from the host plant.

American mistletoe (*Phoradendron serotinum*) can be found growing in deciduous trees from New Jersey and southern Indiana southward to Florida and Texas. It is the state flower of Oklahoma. Mistletoe sold during the holiday season is gathered in the wild. Most mistletoe is harvested in Oklahoma and Texas.


Traditions involving mistletoe date back to ancient times. Druids believed that mistletoe could bestow health and good luck. Welsh farmers associated mistletoe with fertility. A good mistletoe crop foretold a good crop the following season. Mistletoe was also thought to influence human fertility and was prescribed to individuals who had problems bearing children. Mistletoe has also been used in medicine. It has been

used as treatment for pleurisy, gout, epilepsy, rabies, and poisoning. Mistletoe also played a role in a superstition concerning marriage. It was believed that kissing under the mistletoe increased the possibility of marriage in the upcoming year. Although mistletoe has been used in the treatment of several ailments, the berries are poisonous. Individuals using mistletoe during the holiday season should keep the sprigs out of the reach of children. For safety reasons, many companies have replaced the berries with artificial, plastic berries.

Holly

Holly was considered sacred by the ancient Romans. Holly was used to honor Saturn, god of agriculture, during their Saturnalia festival held during the winter solstice. The Romans gave one another holly wreaths, carried it in processions, and decked images of Saturn with it. During the early years of the Christian religion in Rome, many Christians continued to deck their homes with holly to avoid detection and persecution by Roman authorities. Gradually, holly became a symbol of Christmas as Christianity became the dominant religion of the empire.

Hopefully, this information will help you celebrate the holiday season by understanding and engaging in the Christmas traditions that have been formed by the ancient rituals and legends associated with them.



Happy Holidays!
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