

Farm, Home and Garden

By Lillie L. Madsen

Holiday Season Recalls History Of Mistletoe

By LILLIE L. MADSEN
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It must be the season! Requests in the past two weeks for information on mistletoe have been piling up. Requests have been varied, but mostly they have been for legendary material.

Charles A. Cole, formerly with the state department of agriculture, very nicely supplied me with the following information:

In Europe the legend of mistletoe dates back to mythology. For centuries it has had a vague religious or sentimental significance. It seems that Aeneas, by plucking a branch of mistletoe was able to go to the lower regions and return without harm.

Virgil and Pliny used the botanical name "viscum" in describing the plant. The European species is known as viscum album and the American botanists call the east coast species Phoradendrum hoveyense, and that of the Pacific coast Phoradendrum villosum.

Birds Scatter Seeds
The word viscum describes the sticky substance that surrounds the seed. This substance is very important in distributing the seed. The birds, in eating the berries, get the seeds on their feet and beaks, fly to other trees and wipe the sticky substance off on the bark, thus starting a new infestation.

"Infestation" is Mr. Cole's name for the mistletoe, not mine. But he goes on to say that mistletoe is a parasite which feeds on the sap of the host plant, and heavy infestations will kill an oak tree. He quotes Shakespeare to prove his point in using "infestation": "The trees forlorne o'er run with moss and baleful mistletoe."

Mistletoe is found along the South Atlantic seaboard and in the southern states. In the list of state flowers, mistletoe is given as that of Oklahoma.

Grows on Juniper
In Oregon, mistletoe is most abundant from the Columbia River up the Willamette Valley and on to the California coast. The heaviest "infestation" (again to quote Mr. Cole) is between Roseburg and Grants Pass. A few plants are found in Central Oregon growing on juniper, but one would hardly recognize this as mistletoe.

In early Christian England, mistletoe was not used in the religious part of the yuletide festivals. The aversion to using the plant in early Christian festivals dated to the legend of the Druids of early England. This group considered mistletoe a most sacred plant and used it in their annual celebration, held at about the time of the Christian English Yuletide. The Druid priests cut the mistletoe with a golden sickle from trees growing in their groves of worship. Branches of this sacred mistletoe were distributed by young men to homes where it was hung on the doorways to ward off the evil spirits. Other religious sects looked on the custom as black art and therefore barred mistletoe from their religious festivals.

In the early legends of the Norsemen, mistletoe held a part as an agent of destruction. Beldier, the son of Odin and Friga, dreamed that his life was threatened. His mother made all animal and plant life promise not to harm her son, but she forgot to include mistletoe. Beldier's young friends, knowing that he was immune to all things, amused themselves by throwing various kinds of objects at him, only to watch them bounce off, leaving him completely unharmed. Loki, Beldier's secret enemy, found that mistletoe was not included in the list of objects pledged not to harm him, so he made a dart of mistletoe wood and gave it to Hothar, Beldier's blind brother. Hothar threw the dart, piercing Beldier's heart.

Kiss Traced
The kiss under the mistletoe may be traced back to the goddess,

Scene at Labish Christmas Show



Mrs. Joe Henny of Brooks, chairman of the recent Labish Meadows Garden Club Christmas Show, displays the candle arrangement that won a blue ribbon for Mrs. Alvin VanCleave.



The entry pictured above won sweepstakes honors for Mrs. Al Wright at the Labish Meadows Garden Club Christmas Show. Looking at the entry is Barbara Charlene Henny. (Statesman Garden Photos).



Mrs. Walter Bruks of Brooks, who teaches in Salem, is shown pouring refreshments at the Labish Meadows Show.

Horta, of South Germany. This goddess was a questionable young miss who always kept a branch of mistletoe hanging in the center of her reception hall. The kiss under the mistletoe was then considered a sign of fickle love rather than true love, and early churches of Germany forbade hanging mistletoe on doors or near the places of worship.

But not in every locale was mistletoe one of dishonor. In Perthshire, in Scotland, the Hays of Eroll used mistletoe as a badge of honor. By wearing a sprig in battle, victory was assured. To accomplish this, the spray had to be taken from a special large oak growing on the Hays estate at Perthshire.

Willamette Valley has no special legend associated with mistletoe other than its part of Christmas season to go mistletoeing and bring back a few sprigs or bunches.

Mrs. Malne Reichert, Dallas, reports that holly, too, is legendary. She tells that the crown of thorns, placed upon the head of Christ at the crucifixion was made of holly, and that the name "holly" is a corrupt spelling of "holly."

As with mistletoe, holly played a part in the life of the Druids, who wore it in their hair when they went to pick the mistletoe. Early Romans are said to have used holly as decoration in their homes and as a special decking for their idols.

Mrs. Reichert tells of other folk tales, in which holly was believed to repel lightning and thunder and, therefore, was planted close to houses. . . a stick cut from a holly tree was believed to subdue the most stubborn animal, and holly had a power against witches.

But in England it was considered unlucky to bring the holly into the house before Christmas Eve, and even more unlucky to leave it there after Twelfth-night, January 6, 12 nights after the birth of Christ.

Probably there are many other legendary tales connected with both of these "Christmas greens," but I believe most of the questions concerning them are answered here. . . if not, let us hear again. . . and Merry Christmas!

Mulch rhubarb with compost and manure. Mulch asparagus bed likewise. Spread manure now on garden area that does not have cover crop.

Garden Calendar

Question—Can you tell me how long Poinsettias have been associated with Christmas in America? Where is the plant native? We've noted it in Southern California growing outdoors and blooming in gardens. Is it a native there? E. R.

Answer—Poinsettias are native of tropical America. They grow nicely outdoors in Southern California, usually blooming there from early November until late February or early March. The plant is named after Joel Poinsett, a botanist who brought the plant to the States more than a century ago—I believe, garden encyclopedias give about 1830-35.

Question—I recall last year you mentioned several "does" and "don'ts" for the Christmas poinsettia. Would you mind repeating the most important? We don't care about holding the plant over until next season—just making it last as long as possible this one O. T.

Answer—Keep the plant away from draft. A chill draft—even for a brief time may start leaves and bracts falling. Keep the plant from drying out. Set the plant where it will have good light and a temperature between 65 and 70 degrees. The location should be so that drafts from opening doors, will not reach the poinsettia—which makes the hall table out. If the foliage begins to drop normally and slowly, the same cultural conditions should be maintained until half have fallen, then cut the supply of water gradually until the soil is dry in the pot. That's the end of your plant for the season. If you wish to hold them over, and have no greenhouse, store them in a cool dry place, out of light.

Mrs. L. S. T. wants to hold her poinsettia over and asked for further information to the above, so this is included here: In late April take up the poinsettia, cut off the stem to about four inches, re-pot the plant in rich soil, using garden loam with sand and well decayed cow manure and a little leafmold. Grow the plant in a sunny indoor place until all danger of frost is past—usually late May, then sink the pot to the rim in a sunny spot in the garden. Keep it well watered and a mulch of leafmold over the top of the soil in the pot.

During the first few days of September, take the plant indoors, getting it used to the indoor air before the winter heat is turned on.

Question—When may I cut my hydrangeas back? They look aw-

December Month To Spray Peach Trees for Curl

Dormant spray for control of peach leaf curl must be applied this month. This means both for the commercial tree and the lone tree which may ornament a city lot. . . and further, it means both the fruiting and flowering varieties.

Use fresh bordeaux, phygon, purified agriculture spray or calcium polysulphide. Dormant oil in combination with bordeaux or lime sulphur used in winter will kill insect eggs, some over-wintering larvae and insects. Keep insects off of house plants.

Fruiting House Plants Termed Easy to Raise

Nothing is less trouble than some of the fruiting house plants. Orange globes may hang on the Otahaito orange from December until June. The clusters of red berries deck an ardisia just as long, and a Ponderosa lemon, which will have large fruit, is a long-lived acquisition. There are also dwarf forms of pyracantha and pomegranate.

Just about all these take regular watering, an infrequent feeding, trimming in the spring and a brief vacation outdoors in summer sun.

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Answer—If the bushes are so tall that they whip about, head them back, but do not do your real pruning until late February or early March.

Question—What to do with walnut leaves? Have been told they are not good in the compost heap. Have quite a few from one tree on our back lawn. Seems they should be good for something, M. R.

Answer—They compost so much more slowly than the usual leaf that it is unwise to compost the two together. A compost heap of leaves alone is frequently useful. When the foliage is thoroughly composted, use a thin layer of it on the grass beneath the walnut tree—but do not let that layer become so thick that it chokes out the grass. Some of it, too, is very fine in the rhododendron bed—

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