



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

The Texas A&M University System

# Horticultural Update



## Plant of the Holiday Season . . . Passion Flower

*Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist  
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### Passion Flower (*Passiflora*)

Passion Flower is a woody vine that has unusual blossoms. Roman Catholic priests of the late 1500s named it for the Passion (suffering and death) of Jesus Christ.

They believed that several parts of the plant, including the petals, rays, and sepals, symbolized features of the Passion. The flower's five petals and five petal-like sepals represented the 10 apostles who remained faithful to Jesus throughout the Passion. The circle of hairlike rays above the petals suggested the crown of thorns that Jesus wore on the day of his death.



**November & December 1996**

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The priests who named the vine found it growing in what is now Latin America. Today gardeners in many parts of the world raise passion flowers for the blossoms. The flowers may be almost any color. Their diameter ranges from 1/2 to 6 inches.

Most of the approximately 400 species of passion flowers grow in warm regions of North and South America. The maypop, the common passion flower of the Southern United States, bears a yellow fruit. This fruit tastes slightly sour or very sweet, depending on the species. Passion flowers grown for passion-fruit juice are *Passiflora edulis flavicarpa*.

# A Child's Garden of Earthly Delights

## *Twenty-five Gardening Ideas for Kids*

Getting kids into the summer garden is a breeze, but how can you sustain the habit when chilly temperatures force you indoors? With these ideas from the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN), you'll find that fall and winter offer an abundance of gardening opportunities.

### 1. Windowsill Gardens

When snowdrifts keep kids inside, try cultivating a windowsill garden. All you need is a sunny spot and a few containers of dirt. Herbs are an excellent choice for windowsills.

### 2. Peculiar Plants

What kid could resist the fascination of an insect-eating plant? Many garden centers sell Venus Flytraps in their houseplant section.

### 3. Calendar Countdown

Mark your calendar with gardening reminders: start seedlings indoors; prepare soil; plant garden; etc. Then, start counting down the days.

### 4. Pick a Theme

Fall is a great time to plan a theme garden. Try an insect-named garden with butterfly bush and bee balm. An international garden could include French lavender and Greek oregano. The possibilities are endless, but always select themes that will prosper in your growing zone.

### 5. Pizza Plots

Plant a pizza? Why not? Section your plot into wedges of tomatoes, oregano, basil, and peppers. Temperate climates allow this activity year-round; barring that, whet appetites by planning ahead for spring.

### 6. Hidden Treasure

For young children, digging up carrots, potatoes, or radishes is like searching for buried treasure.

### 7. Scarecrows

What would autumn be without one? Search the attic for old clothes, and stuff them with hay or pine straw. Then post your creation in the garden.



### 8. Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum

Kids are impressed with giant versions of pumpkins, gourds, and squash. Next time you're at the garden center, look for novelty varieties created especially for kids.

### 9. Marigold leis

What could be easier to grow than this hardy annual? In some areas, these sunny flowers bloom into fall. Pick blossoms and string along a heavy thread for a colorful lei.

### 10. Watch Seeds Sprout

Line a glass jar with a damp paper towel and insert several zucchini seeds between glass and towel. Place a lid on the jar, leave it on the kitchen counter, and check the paper every day to make sure it's moist. In a few days, those sleeping seeds will burst into life.

### 11. Kids' Gardening Clubs

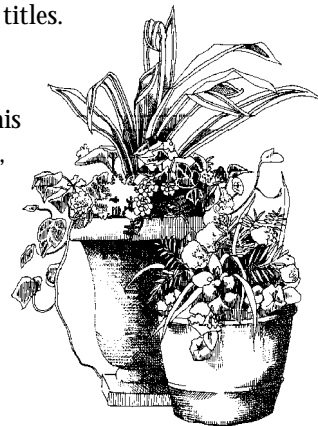
If you haven't visited your garden center lately, you'll be pleasantly surprised to discover the trend toward kid-friendly shopping experiences. Many centers host kids' clubs that are as educational as they are fun.

### 12. Spark Interest with Books

Titles like *Peter Rabbit* and *The Secret Garden* will have kids dreaming of spring gardens all winter long. Ask your librarian or book seller for additional titles.

### 13. Water Gardens

Yes, even kids are getting into this trend. With adult supervision, older children can create a simple water garden from a plastic wading pool. Ask your nursery professional for ideas. Add goldfish for even more fun.



#### 14. A Space of Their Own

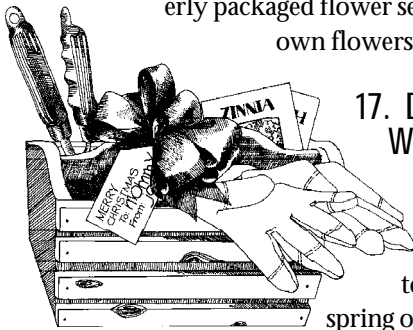
Give older kids their own plot -- a 3 by 4 foot space will do. Let them research what they want to plant and allow them to carry through with the plan. Supervision is advised, but stay in the background as much as possible.

#### 15. Jack and the Beanstalk

Rumor has it that hyacinth beanstalks, with their large leaves and speedy growth, are the beanstalk of legend. In any case, children love the heights to which this bean aspires.

#### 16. Homegrown Holidays

With advance planning, your family can glean gifts from the garden. Dried herbs, tied with decorative ribbons, or cleverly packaged flower seeds collected from your own flowers, are two possibilities.



#### 17. Decorate While You Wait

Let kids indulge their natural creativity by painting inexpensive terra cotta pots to use next spring or for holiday gifts. Craft

stores can direct you to safe yet durable paint selections.

#### 18. Get a Jump Start on Spring

Start seeds indoors to plant after the last frost. Nurseries or Cooperative Extension Services can tell you when it's safe to plant your seedlings.

#### 19. Worm Farm

Line a large cardboard box with a garbage bag. Fill it with soil, organic matter, and a few worms. Keep it shady and moist but not wet. Worms are a fun way for kids to understand the interdependence of plants and organisms. Your wiggly wonders will aerate soil and turn kitchen scraps into valuable compost.

#### 20. Garden Whimsy

Keep a sense of humor by letting children craft garden ornaments. Homemade whirligigs between plant rows and hand-painted plant markers are two examples.



#### 21. Leaf Detectives

Stroll through your neighborhood collecting colorful leaves. Try to identify them with the help of a tree guide, then press and save them in a scrapbook.

#### 22. Terrariums

Carefully place some soil and a few plants (with roots) inside a clean mayonnaise jar. Keep your indoor garden moist with a plant mister and cover the opening with clear plastic wrap.

#### 23. Avian Diner

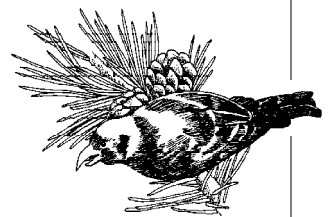
Stock up on bird seed and suet from your garden center and feed the birds. You'll be rewarded with song and color while aiding the birds' winter survival.

#### 24. Pot People

Draw or paint faces on pots, and plant grass seed in the pots for hair.

#### 25. Build a Birdhouse

Birdhouse kits and plans are easily found. This is a great activity for a cold winter's night.

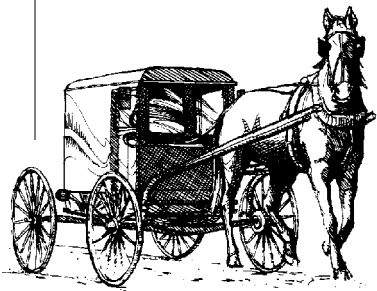


*This article appeared in the American Association of Nurserymen's newsletter "Discover the Pleasure of Gardening," 1996-1997.*

# *Reflections on Native Pecans*

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The pecan industry is one of the most fascinating and intriguing horticultural enterprises in these great United States. We in Texas like to call our state the home of the pecan, yet pecans are native to other parts of North America as well. We know the pecan has been around for a long time, and know it was significant in the diet of the Indians. Yet, the pecan industry as a whole is relatively young.



Sometimes it is amazing to look back and see how far we have come technologically over the last century. My grandmother, for example, has gone from riding a horse-and-buggy to church on Sunday to watching a man land on the moon. The pecan in-

dustry, too, has made great strides, especially from a mechanical and labor standpoint. Today, we have unbelievable mechanization, and a mere few seconds are required to bring a pecan crop down to the ground. However, we, as native-pecan land owners, continue to neglect this vast resource.

Through the years, myths and misconceptions have been handed down about pecan production. The first began with the Indians themselves, as they noted the alternate-year bearing tendency of the trees. Many times in the past, heavy crop years were due to overflows, i.e., rivers depositing alluvial silt, rich in fertilizing elements, over the pecan bottom. As a result, trees would make good growth and produce a bumper crop the following year. Over the years, many rivers and streams have been dammed up to prevent such overflows. In the process, many thousands of acres of pecan bottomland have been lost. Sometimes it seems almost inhumane to destroy such a beautiful resource which took so long to develop. Still, with the lack of overflows, trees have had slower growth, and production has diminished. We must now supply nutrients artificially by applying fertilizers to replace the overflow silt.

This corresponds significantly to another problem in native pecan production: management. Too many people have the notion that since 'granddaddy never did anything to his trees

and he always had pecans', the same holds true today. But we must remember that things are not like they were back then, i.e., river overflows, etc. Today, growing native pecans involves a total management concept, providing (1) proper spacing and sunlight penetration, (2) fertilization, (3) brush and weed control, (4) pest control, and (5) irrigation.

The first step in providing proper spacing and sunlight penetration is to remove all foreign timber, such as hackberry, mesquite, oak, etc., from the pecan bottom. Once this has been done, some pecan trees must be removed as well, to increase sunlight penetration into the grove. Weak, dying trees, crooked trees, etc., should be removed first. All parts of the remaining pecan trees must receive good sunlight or many of the limbs will shade out, and the only potential for pecans will be on the top.

Trees must also be evaluated for production capability and pecan quality. To do this, we must first get the trees growing and bearing pecans. Thus, our next step would be to apply heavy applications of nitrogen fertilizer to stimulate growth. It may take the trees 3 to 5 years to respond, so we must be patient. Once this step has been taken, some type of weed control should be instigated, generally a combination of grazing and occasional shredding. The next step would be to protect the crop that we have worked 3 to 5 years to set with a pest management program. Finally, we should irrigate the trees at least every three weeks.

The potential to produce native pecans every year is there if we are willing to work. Remember that thinning is a continual process, since the trees continue to grow. Also remember that native pecan management is a sequential, step-by-step process. The pecan grower must evaluate his particular economic situation to see which management steps he can afford to take. If only a couple of steps can be implemented, then he should start at the top of the list and work down.

Even though things are not like they used to be in the pecan industry, the potential across this great state for native pecan production is tremendous. In many cases, land owners will be in better shape if they bring their natives into production rather than attempt to establish a planted pecan orchard.

# Discover the Pleasures of Perennials

Like the swallows of San Juan Capistrano, blooming perennials return year after year. Perhaps this reliable permanency is one cause for their increasing popularity in the landscape. Horticulturists thought this upward trend would peak, but consumer demand has risen steadily for the last five years. If you haven't discovered the pleasures of perennials, the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN) offers the following reasons to give them a try.

Annuals bloom one season, and don't vary a lot during that time. Much of perennials' appeal is an ever-evolving landscape, as the plants change from week to week. Beds and borders become more complex in design with the addition of perennials.

Variety is a strong point of perennials. They are virtually unequalled for choice of colors, sizes, habits, and bloom time. Current demand for year-round interest in the landscape is another factor contributing to perennials' favor.

New England and the Pacific Northwest have enjoyed perennials for years. Their climates provide excellent growing conditions. The rest of the country is catching up, however. Even areas with heat, humidity, and heavy soils can grow these long-lived beauties. Growers and nurserymen are cultivating sturdy vari-

eties for these regions. Many areas already have native flowering perennials that are less susceptible to diseases and pests.

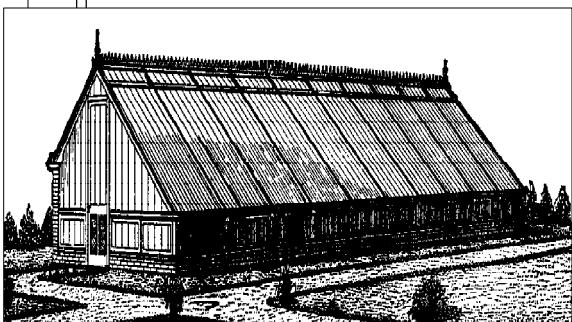


When considering perennials, be sure to factor in additional labor. Perennials are generally more deeply rooted than annuals, so good soil preparation and drainage are keys to their success. Spring or fall is usually a good time to plant -- check with your local garden center. Water is critical during the first few months of growth and establishment.

Don't be fooled into thinking perennials are completely care-free. They require upkeep like any other component in the landscape. Fertilization, cutting back dead foliage, mulching, and dividing are necessary.

If you neglect annuals to the point of killing them, you've only to pull them out and start over. A neglected perennial bed may disrupt the appearance of your landscape for an entire season. However, once established, perennials are usually hardy and easy to care for. A little effort will result in beautiful gardens for years to come.

*This article appeared in the American Association of Nurserymen's newsletter "Discover the Pleasure of Gardening," 1996-1997.*



## Texas and Southwest Greenhouse Growers Conference

November 5 - 7, 1996  
Hilton Hotel and Convention Center  
College Station, Texas

For information, contact Kim Mason at (409) 845-8562

# What's New Under the Sun?

## LANDSCAPING TRENDS FOR 1997

*If gardens are an extension of the owner's personality, the coming year should be an exciting one. Home owners are increasingly sophisticated in their landscaping choices. The American Association of Nurserymen highlights some trends to look for in 1997.*

**Going Native** Use of native plants (or hybrid varieties of natives) is increasing. Some natives require fewer pesticides and less water. Landscape professionals, because of their sensitivity to the environment, are driving this trend.

**Continuous Bloom** Gardeners want something attractive in their yard all year. Growers are meeting this demand with ornamental grasses, colorful berrying plants, and trees and shrubs with interesting bark or seed heads.

**Outdoor Rooms** People are discovering the joys of dining, relaxing, and entertaining in spaces landscaped especially for these purposes. A trellis or tree canopy becomes a ceiling, arbors or shrubs serve as privacy walls, and pavers or ground covers suggest a floor.

**Entry Spaces** Another landscaping method for connecting the home and landscape is an inviting entry space. Instead of foundation plantings, an outdoor foyer is established. Creating an entry might be as simple as placing a large pot of flowers and a bench near the front door. Moving the landscape out from the house allows plants to mature in their natural form rather than being pruned into submission every year. Dimension and interest are heightened, because the landscape isn't viewed all at once.

**Water Gardens** This cool trend is still hot among home owners. Now, however, even apartment dwellers are get-

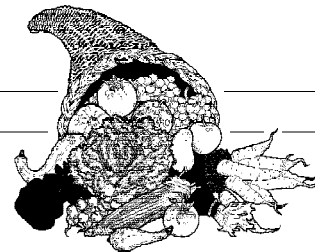
ting into the act with smaller counterparts on decks and patios. Watery retreats are limited only by the imagination. One landscape professional created a relaxing garden in a pot 2 feet high. Fish, snails, and oxygenating plants were included in this deck-top attraction.

**Creative Container Gardening** The one-plant-per-pot scheme is declining. Now, several varieties are grouped dramatically in a single container. Contrasting textures and complementary colors of different plants are massed together. Ideas include salad garden pots containing different lettuces, and tea garden containers of herbs.

**Heirloom Gardens** Everything old is new again as antique roses and 'grandma's gardens' gain favor. Gardeners are rediscovering the honorable qualities of heirloom varieties -- hardiness, disease resistance, subtle fragrance, and color.

**Gardening for Wildlife** Still prevalent is gardening to attract wildlife (especially butterflies). Flower beds nicely define the new grassy islands, and create a more interesting view than the traditional, static landscape.

*This article appeared in the American Association of Nurserymen's newsletter "Discover the Pleasure of Gardening," 1996-1997.*



## Who Are America's Gardeners?

*According to Organic Gardening Magazine's 1992 survey, there are four types of gardeners: Dabblers (60%) are the least experienced and spend less than \$130 per year on gardening. Decorators (19%) are into ornamental horticulture. Cultivators (18%) love to grow and eat vegetables. Masters (3%) are the most experienced and committed of the four groups. Gardening is America's most popular leisure activity.*

*Judith Waldrop, American Demographics*

## X Zapped in the Wallet

A recent article in *Entomological News* [107(2):77-82] reveals that during routine use of electric insect traps, a minute proportion (0.22%) of the 13,789 total killed were biting insects. In contrast, species from 12 orders and more than 104 nontarget insect families, including 1,868 predators and parasites and 6,670 non-biting aquatic insects were destroyed. The heavy toll on nontarget insects and the near absence of biting insects in catches suggest that electric insect traps are worthless for biting-insect reduction (and are probably counterproductive) to home owners and other consumers.

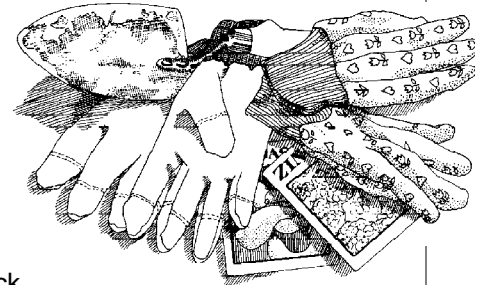
*Dr. Mike Merchant, Extension Entomologist*

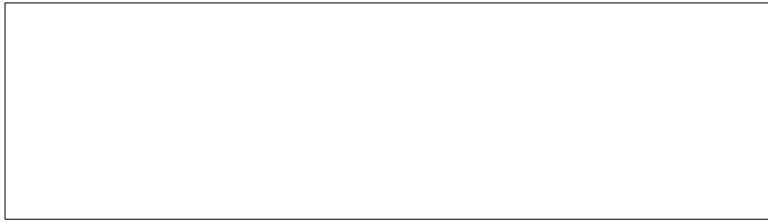


# Garden Checklist for November and December

*Dr. William C. Welch, Landscape Horticulturist  
Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas*

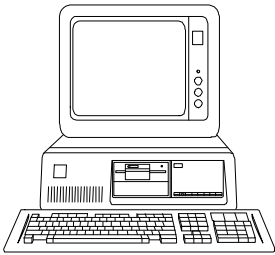
- ☑ Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want.
- ☑ Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.
- ☑ Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well lighted window.
- ☑ Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.
- ☑ Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.
- ☑ November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. In the Panhandle, planting is often delayed until February or early March.
- ☑ Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus.
- ☑ Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.
- ☑ Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.
- ☑ Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.
- ☑ Plant those spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so.
- ☑ Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't over water. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.
- ☑ Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.
- ☑ Don't forget those tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time this month if they have received 60 or more days of chilling.
- ☑ Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.
- ☑ Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half, to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.
- ☑ Take advantage of bad weather and holiday time to study seed and nursery catalogues as well as good gardening books.
- ☑ Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.





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## Aggie Horticulture Website

*Aggie Horticulture* is an information server on the World Wide Web. It contains topics of interest to students, researchers, and teachers: horticulture course syllabi, undergraduate manual, internship forms, academic calendar; faculty and staff photo information pages; Master Gardener and crop production information; links to botanical gardens and arboreta all over the world; tissue culture information; color photos and descriptions of new and unusual ornamental plants; and much, much more.

To connect to the website, your computer must be connected to the Internet and have World Wide Web browser software, such as Mosaic or Netscape Navigator. Boot Mosaic or Netscape, go to the File menu, and open URL. In the dialogue window that pops up, type the following (without spaces):

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>

If you have problems, contact Dan Lineberger in Horticultural Sciences at (409) 845-5278, or on-line at:

[dan-lineberger.tamu.edu](http://dan-lineberger.tamu.edu)

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EDITOR NOVEMBER 1996

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