

December 2022

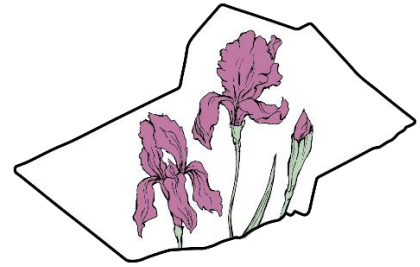
South Schuylkill Garden Club

Third Tuesday of the Month at 6:30

First United Church of Christ, Schuylkill Haven

www.southschuylkillgardenclub.com

www.facebook.com/soschuylkillgardenclub.com



Cultivating the Community Newsletter

Weather Folklore for December

If December is rainy, mild, and unsettled, the winter will not be harsh. If December is cold and the earth is covered with snow, next year's rye will be in abundance. If there's thunder during Christmas week, the winter will be anything but meek. The nearer the New Moon to Christmas Day, the harder the winter.

If Christmas Day be bright and clear, there'll be two winters in the year.

A green Christmas brings a heavy harvest.

A green Christmas makes a fat churchyard.

So many hours of Sun on Christmas Day, so many frosts in the month of May.

If the Sun shines through an apple tree on Christmas, there will be an abundant crop of apples in the coming year.

If it rains on Christmas, there will be four weeks with no sun.

If the wind grows stormy before sunset on Christmas, expect sickness in the coming spring and autumn.

If it snows on Christmas night, there will be a good crop of hops next year.

If at Christmas, ice hangs on the willow, then clover may be cut at Easter.

Light Christmas, light wheatsheaf; Dark Christmas, heavy wheatsheaf.

A bright Christmas foretells that hens will lay well.

A dark Christmas foretells that cows will give much milk.

FYI for 2023

Membership Club Dues are due to Kaye Moyer, 754 Mountain Road, Pine Grove, PA 17963 by December 31 for the coming year. They are still only \$18.00 for the year. Kaye will not be taking dues at the Christmas Party so she can enjoy the evening like the rest of us.

Club Committees for A sign-up sheet was circulated at the October meeting. Please contact Kim if you did not sign up the refreshment and committee sheet for 2023. This information is need for the printing of the 2023 yearbook.

November's Club Meeting

Mother nature dealt us a sloppy mess for our November meeting. A few brave members came out, and we had a Swag Party. More politely put, we created several swags for our doors. Below are a few photos of proud participants:



Thank you to the Refreshment Committee: Nancy Russial, Linda Bollinger, Mary Ann Uranium, Sue Williams.

Christmas Party

South Schuylkill Garden Club
Invites You and Your Guest to
"A Winter Twilight Garden" Christmas Party
Tuesday, **December 13, 2022**, at 5PM
Hoss's Steak & Sea House
Cressona, PA

Please reply by **November 30th** with meal choice
and check made
out to SSGC. Checks and dinner choices will be
collected by Nancy
nmkrussial@gmail.com
570-573-9787
Members \$25.00
Guest \$30.00

Meal Choices:

Baked Stuffed Chicken Breast
Steak Tips
Maryland Style Crab Cakes

**Please mail your information to
Nancy Russial
1222 Schuylkill Mountain Road
Schuylkill Haven, PA 17972**

Donations for Schuylkill Hope Center

If you are inclined, we will be collecting for Schuylkill Hope Center at the Christmas Party. The following items are needed at the Center:

laundry detergent

cleaning supplies (This would include brooms, mops, Lysol and such (no bleach or hard cleaning products), dish detergent, rags or sponges. Black trash bags and paper towels are always needed.)

single bed sheets and pillowcases

monetary donations (Checks can be made out to Schuylkill Hope Center or Schuylkill Women in Crisis.)

Green Goose Playground

A Scarlett Oak was planted and sponsored by SSGC on November 14, 2022. It will be a wonderful addition since it is the first tree planted on the grounds.



SSGC will be taking our winter break with no club meetings till March. However, committee meetings will be held as needed to plan for 2023.

Pat Pipkin shares some last of the season roses. Such beauty to behold!



Some humor from Pat to lighten your day.

Pat also shared some Salvia

Larry Moyer has shared orchid in bloom.

There are 13 blooms of my Cattleya orchid in this bouquet, it is in bloom right now!



Holly: Legends, Customs, and Myths

Holly is an ancient plant associated with layer upon layer of history and cultural significance.



Figure 1. Holly wreath. Photo: Al Elmes on unsplash. CC0

With the onset of autumn, when sunlight is shaved away with every passing day, fear of darkness and the unknown troubled early humankind. Although the air grew chillier and trees were bare, the bright red berry-like drupes and glossy evergreen leaves of European holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) signaled a reason for hope. Not everything in the landscape appeared to be dying.



Figure 2. European holly. Photo: John Ruter, the University of Georgia on Bugwood.org CC BY-NC.

Before every winter solstice, ancient Romans celebrated Saturnalia, a festival honoring Saturn, the god of agriculture, abundance, and renewal. The festivities reminded Romans that the world would not be plunged into darkness. Work was suspended and social norms relaxed; slaves and citizens alike participated; raucous behavior sometimes ensued; wreaths and boughs of holly appeared everywhere, indoors and out; when presents were exchanged, a little holly sprig was tied to each gift. The celebration evolved to last seven days, beginning before the solstice and continuing until December 25, which was the winter solstice by the Julian calendar.

When early Christians defied the worship of Saturn and other Roman deities, trials and executions ensued. These Christians, fearing further persecution, adopted holly as ornamentation during Saturnalia festivities as a kind of mask but altered the symbolism. To them, the spiny thorns along the

plant's leaf margins represented Jesus' crown of thorns, while the red fruits signified droplets of blood. Early Christians didn't celebrate the birth of Jesus per se but were acknowledging Christ's sacrifice at the crucifixion.

Eventually, in the fourth century, with multitudes of religious conversions, Christianity took hold throughout the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine, a Christian himself, approved December 25 as the day of Jesus' birth. What had always been a pagan holiday eventually morphed into a Christian holiday, with holly one of the many remaining remnants.

In the British Isles and other parts of Europe, both pagan and Christian traditions have also employed holly. In one ancient ritual, a boy was donned in holly branches to represent the masculine forces of nature, while a girl was decked in ivy to represent the feminine. Together they were paraded through their village to welcome the winter solstice. Ironically, holly is dioecious, with separate male and female plants necessary for reproduction. Berry-like fruits only appear on the female plants, those most enlisted for ornamentation. A traditional British Christmas carol traced to the fifteenth century, "The Holly and the Ivy," weaves the tale of Jesus' birth, recasting this pagan custom into a Christian version. In another Christian myth, a holly bush sprouted leaves with thorns to hide and protect baby Jesus from King Herod's men. As goes the myth, Jesus reciprocated the deed by making the holly an evergreen.

In nature, holly affords shelter to birds and small mammals during cold winter months and through harsh snowstorms. The berry-like fruits of holly are a key source of nutrition for wildlife. In early fall, their fruits are hard and inedible, but with winter's successive frosts, they tend to soften and become more palatable to the animals that rely on them. While the needle-like appendages that grow along the leaf margins of holly leaves deter some foraging animals on lower branches, the upper branches of holly often lack these sharp spines.

Once upon a geological time, eons ago, broadleaf evergreens inhabited large swaths of the Earth, but over millennia, with repeated glaciations, those forests retreated. *Ilex aquifolium* is related to a common ancestor that was a relic of those primeval

forests, sheltering around the warmer air and milder currents of the Mediterranean Sea. More than 400 species of *Ilex* belong in the family *Aquifoliaceae*, including trees, shrubs, and vines. Species of *Ilex*, the only genus in the Aquifoliaceae family, are found all over the world in many climates, but most species of holly prefer maritime climates with high humidity and relatively mild to warm temperatures. They grow well in western Europe but don't survive in the throes of colder eastern European winters. Today European holly has established itself in the Pacific Northwest and along the Pacific coast into California, where it is considered invasive.

European holly, on its native continent, is a spindly understory tree located in oak or beech forests, but when they are cultivated or protected, as they often are, hollies commonly reach fifty or more feet in height and live 100 years or more. Near Castile and Leon, Spain, the oldest tree is reportedly well over 600 years old. The tallest holly on record is in Canon Wood in Preston Candover, England, and is nearly 83 feet tall or 25.20 meters.

Notions of holly possessing special powers have evolved through the centuries. A book of Scottish folklore describes ardent tree worship and superstitions related to all sorts of plants, from oaks to onions. The author states that holly "has been used from time immemorial as a protector against evil influence." Branches of holly hung over doors as a safeguard against demons. The Roman Pliny the Elder promoted the idea that hollies protected dwellings from being struck by lightning. In Norse mythology, holly belonged to Thor, the god of thunder. And then there are prohibitions. While it is acceptable to prune a branch of holly here or there, cutting down an entire tree is considered bad luck. Witches allegedly avoid them when flying over hedges, and yet holly is supposedly a choice wood for crafting magic wands. The wood is alleged to possess an innate ability for control. Indeed, true or not, coachmen and plowmen preferred whips from coppiced holly well into the nineteenth century.



Figure 3. American holly. Photo: Mandy L. Smith, Penn State

When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, just shy of Christmas in 1620, they stumbled upon a familiar plant. There are 16 varieties of *Ilex* in North America, mostly found on or near the east coast, but their "Christmas holly" reminded the early colonists of the holly back home. American holly (*Ilex opaca*) presents prickly leaves and a conical form, though its leaves tend to have less luster and are more rigid than the European relative; berry-like fruits are occasionally yellow.

Indigenous peoples who lived in the region that is now Pennsylvania, who were neither Christians nor sun worshippers, preserved the berries of holly for decoration and barter. They were used to denote warriors' success in battle and appeared on clothing and hair. The sharp spines and hardwood represented ferocity and fortitude.

American holly grows in forests near the coasts of Massachusetts down to Delaware; it is sprinkled in several southern Pennsylvania counties, then its range continues southward through the Appalachians down to Florida and westward to Texas. It is scraggy in size among some coastal dunes, growing to around 15 or 20 feet tall, but can grow much higher in forests offering more conducive conditions. The record is 99 feet in the Congaree Swamp of South Carolina. The use of American holly as a Christmas decoration was once immensely popular. Roadside markets offered holly during the holidays; consequently, some pickers decimated trees, and the species became scarce in many areas. Because holly is known to be a slow grower, laws in Delaware and Maryland currently

protect the tree. Enjoy holly in your holiday decorating but be mindful of damaging these lovely and symbolic plants.

Authors

Joan Jubela

Master Gardener, Wayne County

So, I started this list below and I would love if all of you experienced gardeners would send me your ideas of "You know you are a Gardner when" Let us keep the ideas flowing and add to the list. Let us see how many ideas we can come up with. Just email your ideas to me at kamorgan11@gmail.com or text it to me at 570-617-0808

You know you are a Gardner when:

- Your gardening gloves fall out of the car door
- You have gardening tools in trunk of your car
- You develop community gardens
- Your gardens are themed
- You weed your neighbors' gardens
- You dead head your daughter's flowers
- You empty the dehumidifier and use the water to water your potted plants
- You sprinkle your son's hair from a recent haircut around your plants to keep the deer away
- Pull weeds in public gardens
- Carry a small set of pruners in your back pocket
- You are constantly checking the weather report.
- You plant by the phases of the moon
- You cover your fall plants to protect them from the first fall frost
- You count on the first frost being in November
- You cover your plants before the frost hits.
- Clean your gardening equipment before putting away for the season
- You stare looking at seed and plant catalogues for next year

- You know you are a Gardener ... When you go to the store for groceries and come home with some plants that just jumped into your cart. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when you can resist everything but temptation in a Garden Center. There is always room for one more. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when you smile YES when a gardener-friend asks you if you could use a few irises or daylilies that she is separating because they need thinning. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when the Plant catalogs arrive in the middle of winter. – Pat P.
- You know you are a Gardener ... when the plants in your garden have come from other gardening friends. Memories ... I plant my friends. – Pat
- You are out on those warm sunny days looking for the first signs of spring popping up from the soil.
- You are looking for the first robin to land in your yard.
- The March winds blow off your sun hat when you are out in the garden.
- You are anywhere that you see drying seed pods on a plant, and you wonder if you can get away with collecting some and where you can try planting them. -Kathy T.
- You know you are a gardener when your dog digs a hole going after a varmint and then you place a plant in it – Jeanne
- You know you are a gardener when you light 8 candles in your greenhouse so your peppers and tomatoes do not freeze on a cold night. - Carol H.
- When you are walking by the restaurant entrance and see weeds in the flowerbeds. Your husband turns to you and says, “Don’t even think about it.”- Linda
- When talking in your neighbor’s yard and you bend down to pull weeds.
- When you are watering plants with the dehumidifier water.
- When you stop everything, you are doing to watch it rain.
- You know you are a Gardner when “you do container gardening on an elevated deck and front porch to keep plants deer safe. Deer haven’t learned to do steps to date”
- *You know you are a gardener when*
_____.

***Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year to You and
your Family.***