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Investment &  
Protect the  
Environment

NC STATE UNIVERSITY NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

## JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

### 'Green Giant' Stands Tall Among Evergreens

**T**he *Thuja plicata* 'Green Giant' is a vigorously growing, pyramidal evergreen with rich green color. The genus is more commonly referred to as arborvitae, which is known for its lustrous dark green leaves in summer with a bit of bronzing in winter months. 'Green Giant' has the added feature of a faint white streak on the bottoms of leaves, giving the entire tree a slight but noticeable accent of color.

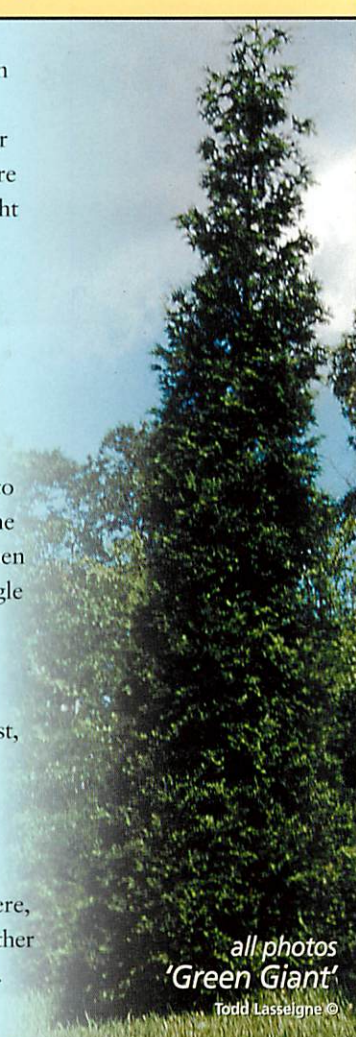
This cultivar has been available in the U.S. for 30 years, having been imported from Denmark. While 'Green Giant' is not a big seller for North Carolina nurseries, it is gaining in popularity as an excellent substitute for Leyland cypress. Many lower growing cultivars also are available and make good landscape additions.

Mature specimens can grow to 40' tall with an 8' spread so be sure to give them plenty of room. 'Green Giant' is best used in multiple plantings to create a living frame for your landscape, lending a feeling of formality to the garden. The frame also may function as a screen to create more privacy when planted in rows. If not a frame, then 'Green Giant' is also effective as a single specimen that functions as an evergreen sentinel.

'Green Giant', as well as most of its relatives, is not troubled by any significant insect pest or disease problems. It tolerates a wide range of soil types and hardiness zones. Because of its popularity in the Pacific Northwest, few gardeners realize that it has great potential for landscape use in North Carolina. Growth rates of 2- to 4-feet per year have been reported at the JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) in Raleigh, making 'Green Giant' a plant with many favorable characteristics.

Visit the JCRA to see this plant and other arborvitae cultivars. While there, visit the new education center. To learn more about upcoming speakers and other educational offerings at the JCRA, visit [www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum](http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum).

*Carl Matyac*



all photos  
'Green Giant'  
Todd Lasseigne ©

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Poinsettia



Amaryllis



Paperwhite Narcissus

## Extending the Beauty of Holiday Plants

*Blooming plants are a colorful holiday tradition. Extend their beauty with these guidelines.*

### Poinsettia

This traditional Christmas plant is available in red, pink, gold, white and variegated colors. Look for a plant with dark green, healthy foliage, strong stems and bright colored bracts. Always check for insects before bringing a new plant into your home. If the temperature outside is below 50 degrees, have the plant wrapped before taking it outside. Place your poinsettia in a well-lighted location out of direct sunlight and drafts. If the plant comes in a decorative wrapping, make a hole in the bottom to allow for good drainage. Water often enough to keep the soil evenly moist but not soggy. Wilting and yellowing of leaves can result from both too little and too much water. Do not let the plant sit in the water as this may result in root rot. The colorful bracts may only last for several weeks but the poinsettia can be kept as a green houseplant all year. Water regularly to keep the soil moist and fertilize monthly. The poinsettia requires long nights to stimulate bloom. If you want it to bloom again for next year's holidays, place the poinsettia in a room where you can keep it in the dark for 14 hours at night beginning in October. You may cover it with an inverted wastebasket or dark plastic garbage bag each night to keep the light out if a dark room is not available.

### Christmas Cactus

A thornless member of the cactus family, the Christmas cactus requires bright, indirect light and needs light to moderate watering. During the spring and summer, water and fertilize at regular intervals. Keep soil moist to touch but do not allow plant to sit in water. The Christmas cactus prefers a humid environment and may be placed on a pebble tray. To encourage bud development, begin cutting back on watering in late summer or fall, keeping the soil barely moist to touch. This will allow the plant to become dormant. Do not feed the cactus during this time. Six weeks before Christmas place the plant in a room with cooler temperatures of about 60 to 65 degrees. It should receive 10 hours of light during the day and 14 hours of total darkness at night. If you do not have a totally dark room, cover the plant at night with a dark garbage bag to achieve this. When the buds form, resume regular watering and feeding again.

### Amaryllis

The amaryllis is a tropical grown for its large, 8- to 10-inch blooms. It comes in shades of red, pink, orange, coral, white and bicolor. Plant the amaryllis bulb in a pot with adequate drainage, just barely larger than the bulb. Amaryllis bulbs like to be pot-bound. Use sterile potting soil, adding about an inch to the bottom of the pot. Place the bulb in the pot, making sure to spread the roots carefully. Add more soil, leaving about 2/3 of the bulb above the soil level. Water thoroughly. When it begins to grow, move the amaryllis to a sunny location. Water whenever the soil feels dry to the touch. Fertilize monthly. After the plant has finished blooming, cut back the flower stalk but not the leaves. Continue to grow the plant as you would any other houseplant, watering and fertilizing at regular intervals. In the spring, place the amaryllis plant in a window where it gets bright sun or move it outside in a sunny location. In September, bring the plant indoors. Place in a cool area (preferably about 55 degrees) and do not water for 5 to 8 weeks. In November, remove all of the old foliage and water thoroughly. Place in a sunny location. When the plant starts growing, resume fertilizing. Water in stages, increasing the amount of water as it grows. New blooms should appear in about 3 to 8 weeks.

### Paperwhite Narcissus

Paperwhite narcissus bulbs are among the easiest to force if you want a beautiful floral display for the holidays. Buy bulbs that are firm to the touch and have no discoloration. Start with an inch or two of sterile soil in a shallow, decorative container. Place the bulbs close together, nearly touching each other, with the pointed end facing up. Add more potting soil, gravel or decorative filler to hold them in place. Water thoroughly and often enough to keep moist. Paperwhites also can be grown in water alone by using marbles, stone chips or pebbles to hold the bulbs upright. They do not require fertilizer. After planting, place the container in a well lighted but cool room until the shoots get an inch tall. They can then be moved to a warmer location. Their blooms will last from about 4 to 8 weeks. They bloom only once, and when done, should be discarded.

*Craig Mauney*

## Gift Idea!

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## gardentalk

*"The greatest gift of a garden is the restoration of the five senses."*

— Hanna Rion

## Q&A How do I keep skunks away from my property?

Striped skunks are found throughout the state. Though they are beneficial when they feed on agricultural and garden pests, they become a problem in the home landscape when they come in search of white grubs and insects. Skunks dig holes in lawns, golf courses and gardens to search for grubs found in the soil. Digging normally appears as small, 3 1/2- to 4-inch, cone-shaped holes or patches of upturned turf.

To limit the attractiveness of your home landscape to skunks, eliminate any places of refuge such as lumber and junk piles, store garbage in tightly sealed cans and clean up pet foods. Control of grubs in turf will eliminate a prime food source. Information

on white grub control can be provided by your county Extension Center.

If you have fencing installed on your property and skunks and other mammals are a problem, you might consider placing a single strand of electric fencing at the base of the fence, approximately 3 to 4 inches above the ground. When an animal approaches the fence to dig at its base and comes in contact with the electrified wire, the animal receives an unpleasant, but harmless, shock on its nose. Do not use electrified fence material in areas where small children have free access to it. In addition, keep in mind that any use of electrified materials must have clearly posted warnings alerting people to its presence and use. **Royce Hardin**

## Plants Add Winter Color and Interest

Winter need not be a drab period of plant dormancy considering the plant choices that provide beautiful winter color and interesting shapes.

Plants that produce berries or fruit provide striking color in a monochromatic landscape. Holly varieties to consider include Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), *Ilex* 'Nellie R. Stevens' and a nice deciduous species such as winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). All look stunning in the landscape in time for the winter holidays.

Other plants are beautiful even without leaves or berries. Red twigged dogwoods (*Cornus* spp.) or the golden stemmed forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*) look wonderful against a frozen evergreen backdrop. A variety of peeling or flaking bark textures add an element of interest from a distance. Trees with these different bark types include birch, cherry, sycamore, hickory and apple. Branching patterns of some trees and shrubs can add delicate interest.

The curling corkscrew willow (*Salix matsudana* 'Tortuosa') or the strong branching of a Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) look structurally appealing during the winter months. Ornamental grasses have landscape interest year-round and the long thin leaves of *Miscanthus* spp. add fine textures as they sway in the winter breeze.

**Diane Ashburn**

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Involve Family in Recycling Project

Are you looking for a great way to teach your children about science and the environment? A worm bin can help teach important lessons and will provide an excellent soil amendment to boot! Vermicomposting, which is using worms to compost your kitchen scraps, demonstrates the processes of recycling and decomposition. It also shows how each organism has an important role to play in our ecosystem.

To get started, you will need a wooden or plastic bin with plenty of air holes (2 feet by 3 feet by 8 inches will suffice for the average family), 10 pounds of bedding material and one pound of redworms. Use organic matter such as shredded paper, composted livestock manure, decaying leaves or peat moss for bedding. Soak organic matter overnight before use. Order your worms from a commercial grower to be sure you are getting the correct type. Add them to the organic matter in the bin.

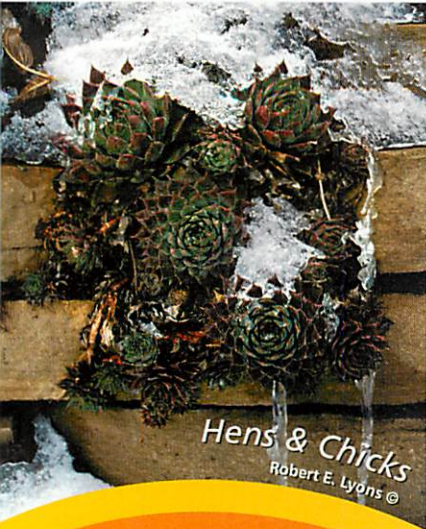
The bin should need very little maintenance. Simply bury your vegetable scraps in the bin and monitor the moisture level. If you notice any odor it means that either the bedding is too moist or you've added too many food scraps.

After about 3 months, you can harvest the compost. To do so, push all the bedding material to one side of the bin and fill up the other side with fresh bedding. For the next few weeks, only add food scraps to the new bedding material. All the worms will migrate to the new bedding, and you can harvest the old. Use it as a soil amendment in your garden or potted plants.

For more information, request a copy of "Worms Can Recycle Your Garbage" from your county Extension Center, or visit the Web site [www5.bae.ncsu.edu/programs/extension/publicat/wqwm/comp.html](http://www5.bae.ncsu.edu/programs/extension/publicat/wqwm/comp.html)

**Paul McKenzie**





Garden Spot

## The Montrose

**Estate**, located on the Eno River in Hillsborough's historic district, features over 60 acres of woodland, open meadows and rock gardens – all filled with brilliant colors and exciting water features. All of this and more is set to the backdrop of a 19th century estate.

Montrose is a private garden owned by garden writer and gardener Nancy Goodwin and her husband Craufurd. The land was purchased in 1977 from descendants of William Alexander Graham, a political figure in the mid-1800s.

Montrose is open to the public twice a year to visitors to tour the gardens at their leisure. Over 2,100 people visit Montrose each year. To set up a tour or for more information, write Montrose, P.O. Box 957, Hillsborough, North Carolina, 27278, or call Nancy Goodwin at (919) 732-7787 between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

*Ben Dungan*

## Gardening in December

### Lawns

- Coastal lawns will soon be dormant. Continue to mow, rake leaves and water during dry spells.
- Apply broadleaf herbicides to control winter annual and perennial weeds. Watch for dry, windy conditions with low relative humidity that can damage turf. It may be necessary to irrigate periodically to help the grass survive.
- Fertilize cool-season lawns in early December.

### Ornamentals

- Landscape plantings can still be done at this time of the year. Wet soils are rather unforgiving. Find something else to do until the soil is workable. Be sure the roots don't dry out or freeze in the meantime. Keep them in a barn or garage for a few days to protect the root ball.
- Tip pruning can be done this month. Many evergreens are used in various holiday decorations. Both the foliage and the berries of many favorites, including the holly species, nandina, pines and cedars, are popular for decorating the house. Remember not to make heavy, renovative-type pruning cuts until late winter.
  - Visit [www.successfulgardener.org](http://www.successfulgardener.org) to learn how you can give gift subscriptions to *Extension's Successful Gardener* newsletter to friends and family members.
  - Continue mulching and composting chores. Plants will love the added benefits and the mulch may help them survive the winter.

### Edibles

- Order fruit trees adapted to your area and designate shipping dates that avoid hard, frozen ground problems when planting.
- Plant balled-and-burlapped, bare root and container grown fruit trees.
- Begin pruning fruit trees at the end of this month.

*David Barkley*



Tune in to "Making It Grow!" – a gardening show featuring Extension agents from the Carolinas. Saturdays, Noon, WTVI 42, Charlotte

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