

## Gardening

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degrees. Water sparingly until the stem appears, then, as leaves appear, gradually water more. In general, it takes seven to 10 weeks for a bulb to flower. You can plant bulbs at two-week intervals to enjoy flowers all winter long.

Another way I "garden" this time of the year is by replacing the dead annuals and faded mums in my window boxes and containers with evergreen boughs. I love mixing different textures and colors to create a lush green look that lasts all winter.

Adding berries like rose hips, American cranberry, blue-berried juniper or holly adds a splash of color. I have also used red twig dogwood and sumac for even more visual interest. It makes such a difference having something green to look at every day instead of empty, sad win-

dow boxes. It is one of the little ways I have of getting through the long, gray winter.

Evergreens made into wreaths are a decoration that comes from Europe. The evergreen branches symbolize eternal life and the circular shape is the emblem of eternity. If you have a fireplace, the Yule log might be a tradition you would enjoy beginning with family and friends. It usually comes from an oak tree, but fruit trees are also used.

They are cut and brought to the home to be burned on Christmas Eve. The flames burn out all old wrongs, replacing them with happiness and good cheer.

Happy Holidays and a Blessed Christmas to all of you from all of us at Pine Hill Village Gardens and Pine Hill Nursery.

*Jeanine Rubert can be reached at [jrubert@pinehill-nursery.com](mailto:jrubert@pinehill-nursery.com). Pine Hill Nursery's Traverse City location is open until the end of December and would be happy to help you with your winter "gardening" projects.*

## Poinsettias

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Another early bloomer is Winter Rose Early Red, a variation on Ecke's innovative plant with curled bracts that resemble rose blooms.

"Poinsettias begin turning color when the nights become longer than the days, usually starting at the end of September," Kramer said. "But the time it takes each variety to come into full bloom varies. Autumn Red is in full bloom in 7 ½ weeks, compared to 9 ½ weeks for others."

Armstrong Garden Centers grow a variety of Ecke poinsettias from cuttings at its growing fields in San Juan Capistrano, Calif. In addition, this year the Glendora, Calif.-based company is introducing a variety developed by Dummen, a European-based breeder.

Merlot, exclusive to Armstrong last holiday season, has velvety

deep cranberry-red bracts held above holly-like leaves. Only 7,000 plants were shared by the chain's 35 stores, mostly in Southern California.

"We spotted Merlot in a bundle of test varieties from Dummen," said Armstrong spokesman Chris Greenwood. "I liked the plant because it tends to have more internal foliage and the bloom color is very sophisticated, like a light shining through a glass of merlot."

To keep poinsettias cheery throughout the season, treat them as you would any other holiday guest. Don't put them too close to a roaring fire or leave them outside by the front door; like you, poinsettias are most comfortable between 68 and 70 degrees. Don't deprive them of water, but avoid constant "wet feet." Even moisture is best. And don't tuck them in a dark corner without light or attention; they like indirect sunlight for at least six hours a day.

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