

**Baker County Extension Service**  
1025 West Macclenny Avenue  
Macclenny, FL 32063

Phone (904) 259-3520  
Fax (904) 259-9034

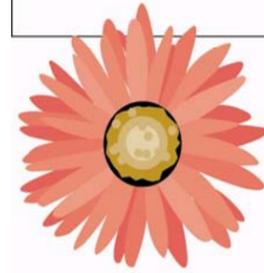
Email: [alamborn@ufl.edu](mailto:alamborn@ufl.edu)  
Website: <http://baker.ifas.ufl.edu>

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Highlights in

*Horticulture*

Baker County

December 2009

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Dear Extension Friends,

The holiday season is a time for family, friends, and giving thanks. One way of giving thanks to those special to you is to give a gift that keeps on giving: a plant that can be enjoyed for years to come or a tree planted in one's name that many can enjoy. I wish everyone a happy and safe holiday and look forward to assisting the community with their gardening questions, concerns, and needs in the coming year.

Best Regards,

*Alicia*

Alicia R. Lamborn  
Horticulture Extension Agent  
Baker County Extension Service



Extension programs are open to all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, handicap, or national origin. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person needing a special accommodation to participate in any activity, should contact the Baker County Cooperative Extension Service at 1025 West Macclenny Avenue, Macclenny, FL 32063 or telephone (904) 259-3520 no later than five (5) days prior to the event. Hearing impaired persons can access the foregoing telephone by contacting the Florida Relay Service at 1-800-955-8770 (voice) or 1-800-955-8771 (TDD).

**Poinsettia Care**

When caring for your potted poinsettias inside, keep them in a brightly lit area, away from drying or chilly drafts. They prefer daytime temperatures of about 75 to 80°F and a night temperature of 65°F. Water only when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch, removing excess water from the saucer or pot sleeve. Do not apply fertilizer. They will tolerate full sun on a porch or patio but must be protected from frost and freezing temperatures.

The best poinsettias for establishing in the landscape are ones that have been given good lighting and remained green and healthy. Red varieties usually establish better than other colors. Because breeders focus on creating new and exciting colors, patterns, and unique features, the cold hardiness of the plant is usually lost.

Purchasing plants that are blooming in mid-November may increase your chances of having them bloom outside before the freezes come next year. Plant your potted poinsettia as soon as danger of frost is past, being sure to choose a bright location that will not receive any artificial light at night. Also, cut off the fading bracts, leaving 4-6 inches of the stem on each branch. Keep the plant mulched and well watered until established. Fertilize monthly from May to September. Discontinue any pruning after September 10th since flower buds will begin to develop in October if conditions (temperature and daylength) are right.

**2009 Poinsettia Show and Sale**

**Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup> 8 am to 4 pm**

Don't miss the University of Florida poinsettia open house at the Environmental Horticulture Greenhouses on campus in Gainesville.

Over 100 varieties will be on display of all colors and types. Check out the newest poinsettia introductions and novel varieties.

Be a part of their study by filling out a survey and picking your favorite poinsettias.

Purchase poinsettia varieties that can't be found anywhere else and support the Environmental Horticulture Club students.



University of Florida  
Environmental Horticulture Dept.  
1545 Fifield Hall  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
Phone (352) 392-1831  
<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu>

**Houseplants: Winter Shifts the Focus from Outdoors to Indoors**



As the weather gets colder, many of us will need to start moving our potted plants to warmer locations, which typically include inside the house. However, factors such as temperature, light and humidity are key to insuring that indoor plants thrive. Adverse conditions inside a home can make it challenging for plants to make it through winter, even without the freezing temperatures.

The most important factor for indoor plants is adequate light. Flowering plants, plants with highly colored leaves, and succulents will grow best in a window where they receive full sunlight. Foliage plants, such as ferns and philodendrons, will prefer a window receiving indirect light (north-facing window in winter).

Artificial lighting, using standard cool white and warm white fluorescent lamps, can also be used to supplement or replace natural light as needed.

Most plants grow well indoors when temperatures are between 65° and 75°F and approximately 10°F lower at night (this allows plants to build new tissues and keeps them from becoming spindly and less resistant to pests). Also be aware that sudden changes in temperature can injure plants and care should be taken not to place them in hot or cold spots. These include on top of the TV, in the path of heater (or air conditioning) vent, and in windows that are not energy efficient (letting a lot of cold air in at night).

Continued on page 2...

## Cold Weather Tips



- If a freeze is predicted, water plants 24-48 hours before a freeze (unless it rains). Moist soil absorbs more solar radiation than dry soil and will radiate heat during the night, keeping your plants warmer. Keep in mind however, that prolonged periods of saturated soil can cause root rot problems.
- Using overhead irrigation for freeze protection is tricky since you have to start irrigating as soon as the temperature reaches 32 degrees and keep it on until thaw is complete. Not only can this be very wasteful, but there is a danger of root rot problems and breakage due to ice buildup on limbs. This method of cold protection is used commercially where it can be carefully controlled and is best left to professional growers.
- Instead, you may want to cover some of your cold sensitive landscape plants with blankets or plastic to trap heat inside, but too often is this done incorrectly. If you decide to use this method, make sure your cover is long enough to reach the ground. You may also want to place rocks, bricks, or heavier flower pots around the edges to keep the wind from blowing the cover open. This is the only way to truly trap heat inside. You will also need to use a stake (cut bamboo sticks work well) to keep your cover from touching your plant. Some contact is unavoidable, but too much can lead to a transfer of heat resulting in burnt, damaged foliage.
- Citrus fruit is damaged when temperatures stay at 28 degrees or less for 4 hours so be sure to harvest ripe fruit (fruit won't ripen once picked) prior to a hard freeze. You will want to protect the graft union during a hard freeze to prevent damage, especially if you have young citrus. To do this, you can bank clean sand around the base of the tree, covering the graft, or you can purchase a special tree wrap product. Pipe insulators have also been known to work well.
- Use your fallen oak leaves and pine straw to your advantage! These items are valuable for several reasons. They can be used as mulch to repel weeds and hold in moisture, but they can also be used to protect your plants during hard freezes. Many of our perennials die back to the ground in winter, only to grow back from the roots and crown the next spring. Piling leaves and straw on top of these crowns will help hold the heat in and protect the roots from damage during those hard freezes.
- Containerized plants can be pushed together and covered with an old sheet to conserve heat, or moved under a sheltering tree or eave where radiant heat will be trapped after dark.

## Houseplants continued....

Humidity is another factor to consider when growing plants indoors, especially in the winter. Most plants grow best at a relative humidity of 40 to 60 percent, but the average humidity in most homes is well below 40 percent, particularly during the winter months when heating systems are operating. Low humidity levels will cause your plant to lose water from the leaves faster than the roots can absorb water, causing leaf tips to become brown and flower buds to drop. Installing an inexpensive humidifier will improve humidity levels, as well as placing plants close together or on a bed of wet gravel. The gravel should be two to three inches deep and the water level should never come high enough so that the plant is sitting in water. As the water evaporates, the humidity level will increase around the plant.

Overwatering is probably the number one cause of indoor plant death. When the soil remains saturated, the roots are not able to function properly due to a lack of oxygen (yes, plant roots need oxygen) and may start to rot. The amount and frequency of watering is a bit of a guessing game however, since it really depends on your potting soil mix, your pot, the type of plant, the size of your plant, the stage of growth and the humidity level. In general, it is time to water when the soil feels dry, when the soil shrinks away from the sides of the pot, if the pot feels light when you pick it up, or when the soil changes from a dark to light color.

Water thoroughly when watering is required, applying enough water until it runs out the bottom of the pot. You can also water from the bottom of the container but will need to water from the top at least once per month to wash out the excess salts that build up. Either way is fine but do not allow water to stand in the saucer too long.

If you would like more detailed information on caring for houseplants, including fertilizing, problem solving, propagating, visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg031> to read 'Care of Plants in the Home'. Included in this publication is a table that indicates the amount of light required by many common houseplants. Check to see if your plants are on the list!

If your house environment is not conducive to plant health or you simply don't have room for your plants indoors, check out the directions for building a cold frame on page 3 which can be used during winter and broken down for storage the rest of the year.



## Building A Cold Frame

Most garden enthusiasts have potted plants that do not tolerate cold temperatures in winter. But instead of breaking your back this winter by hauling plants inside every time a hard freeze comes, build yourself a cold frame structure to house those precious plants until spring.

### Basic Structure: Quonset Design, 3' high x 6' wide x 20' long

#### Materials Needed:

- 4 3/4" schedule 40 PVC pipe, 20' lengths
- 1 12' x 30' white copolymer film, 6 mil
- 32 3/4" electrical conduit hangers
- 1 2" x 8" x 12' treated lumber
- 4 2" x 8" x 10' treated lumber
- 4 Metal mending plates
- 1 200 ft. roll gauge steel wire (or heavy cord)
- 80 Wood screws

#### Tools Required:

- Carpenter saw
- Electric drill
- Tape measure
- Builder's square
- Pencil
- Garden rake
- Side cutting pliers
- A friend



#### Site Selection:

Choose a site for your structure that is fairly level with a water source nearby. The structure should also be oriented North-South (east-west orientation supplies more overall light, but north-south orientation supplies more uniform light).

#### Construction:

- 1—Level an area 8' wide x 24' long.
- 2—Cut the 2" x 8" x 12' lumber in half, making two pieces 2" x 8" x 6' that will be used for the ends of the bed.
- 3—Butt the ends of two of the 2" x 8" x 10's together and nail/screw securely using mending plates on each side, so that you have a 2" x 8" x 20' side board.
- 4—Repeat step 3 using the remaining two pieces of 2" x 8" x 10's. The two sides of the bed (kickboards) are now assembled.
- 5—Lay kickboard sides on edge 6' apart on the leveled area and place a 2" x 8" x 6' section outside each end. Square the corners, then nail/screw together securely. (Screws will allow for easier breakdown, if required.)
- 6—At each of the four corners (on the inside edges), attach a conduit hanger using screws so that the top of the hanger is flush with the top edge of the boards. Any nails/screws that come through should be bent over so that they will not tear the copolymer cover.
- 7—Repeat step 6, attaching the bottom of the conduit hangers flush with the bottom of the boards.
- 8—Starting from the center of the top conduit hangers, mark off the kickboards along the length of the structure at 33 13/16 inch intervals.
- 9—At each of the marked intervals, center and screw in two conduit hangers (at top and bottom) as in Steps 6 and 7.
- 10—Cut the four 20' lengths of PVC pipe in half so that you have eight 10' pieces.
- 11—For each section of PVC pipe, slip one end down through a set of conduit hangers, bend the pipe in a bow across the width of the structure, and slip the other end of the pipe down through the opposite set of conduit hangers.
- 12—Place containerized materials inside the structure (more cold tolerant plants should be placed around the perimeter) and water thoroughly. An application of fungicide may be necessary after irrigation.
- 13—Using flexible wire or heavy cord, tie the bows of PVC pipe together so that they cannot flex to either side. An alternative is to use a single PVC 20' length centered at the top and attached to each bow to add greater rigidity to the frame.
- 14—Center the 12' x 30' sheet of white copolymer film over the hoop frame.
- 15—The cover can be secured by covering the 1' of surplus film along one of the long sides with soil. To allow easy access to the plants, the other three sides of the film can be held down with boards, rocks, or pieces of wood.

\*\*\*This structure will require venting. This can be done by opening the ends (or rolling up one side, as shown in the above photo) and then closing them down again later in the day. Depending on the plant material, closing the structure may only be necessary when temperatures fall below 32 degrees. Remember to place the most cold sensitive plant material in the middle of the structure so that it stays the warmest.

If properly constructed, the framework of your Quonset should last for years (white copolymer cover should last at least two years). Precautions should be taken to insure that nails and wire used in construction of the framework are properly bent and do not tear the cover (releasing heat trapped inside). Also, it is best to remove the cover when the Quonset is not in use. Carefully roll the cover up (do not fold) and store it out of direct sunlight. This will extend the life of the cover.