

# MAT-SU MASTER GARDENER'S NEWSLETTER

Dec 2017



## President's Patch

By President Rhonda Bowman

I can't believe that the year is coming to an end soon. It just seems like we were tending to our gardens. I am watching the snow outside thinking about how many folks took the time to make sure there was adequate coverage for their perennials? Mine have some straw on them especially since the last two snows in my yard blew away due to our regular winds. It is a sad reminder, but the coming months are usually colder and without good protection it would affect your plants, even long-term or hardy ones.

We have Colony Christmas coming up and I will be glad to see all the decorations up for Christmas. It is my favorite time of the year. Hopefully your family will be blessed for the holidays. It is a good time to remind everyone to give to those who could use some help at this time of the year. Santa Cop is a great charity for providing help to seniors to provide them with gifts to brighten up their holiday!

We have our Master Gardener Christmas Party coming up on December 4 at Turkey Red in place of our regular meeting. Members should bring a side dish or dessert. Turkey Red has been a great host for this annual event and we appreciate their help. It will be held in their private conference room.

Have a great holiday season!



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### GENERAL MEETINGS FIRST MONDAY OF THE MONTH

#### NEXT MEETING

**MONDAY, DEC 4TH, ROOM OPENS AT 6:00**

**P.M.; DINNER AT 6:30 P.M.**

**LOCATION: TURKEY RED, PRIVATE  
CONFERENCE ROOM, 550 S ALASKA ST,  
PALMER, AK 99645**

**PLEASE NOTE THE TIME!**

#### MEETING AGENDA

- POTLUCK DINNER
- BRIEF BUSINESS MEETING
- CHINESE AUCTION

#### SPEAKER/TOPIC CHRISTMAS PARTY

**THE ASSOCIATION WILL PROVIDE TURKEY AND HAM FOR THE POTLUCK. DINNER IS AT 6:30. MEMBERS ARE ASKED TO BRING A SIDE DISH OR DESSERT TO SHARE. THERE WILL BE A CHINESE AUCTION GIFT EXCHANGE. IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE BRING A WRAPPED GIFT (\$10 LIMIT).**

## PEASANT'S PERSPECTIVE: BY CURT MUELLER, MASTER GARDENER

Photos by the author

Winter is for the birds, thinks the peasant. No, not in a bad way, but in a bird way. Starting with the lively chickadees and nuthatches, the number of species visiting our feeder this season soon increased to include pine grosbeaks, gray jays, Steller's jays, woodpeckers, and magpies. Some are greedy and keep the smaller birds away, but they are tolerated anyway. Chickadees come for black sunflower seeds and an occasional bit of suet. Rarely, a boreal chickadee has shown up amongst the ubiquitous blackcaps, which come to grab a seed and then fly off with it to shell and eat it and return for another. Sadly, sometimes one with an unfortunately deformed beak will show up.



Bohemian waxwing feeding on crabapples

The red-breasted nuthatches feast on suet and seeds and stay on the feeder to dine. They often drive off the blackcaps. Perky and feisty guys, they are. Grosbeaks mainly feed on wee crabapples, but do occasionally visit the feeder. When dining on crabapples they eat the seeds, and spit out the pulp. This is unlike the waxwings which consume the whole fruit but don't come to the feeder.

Incidentally, the feeder is outside our dining room window about twelve feet off the ground. A tray about 16 by 60 inches, it

can be serviced from inside the house and the birds can be observed while we ourselves are enjoying a meal.

The Steller's jays, a pair of which come to the feeder several times a day, consume much food. They are strikingly colored with the black crest and iridescent blue on their sides. The peasant has taken to feeding them some shelled unsalted peanuts which they gobble down whole. Maybe they'll leave more of the other food for the smaller birds. Hairy woodpeckers are suet eaters as are the downy woodpeckers, a smaller species. Earlier the peasant has seen a male hairy woodpecker feeding its young on the feeder. Apparently, the young ones are fed by the parents for some time after they can fly.



Male pine grosbeak feeding on suet

The gray jays and magpies don't show up every day, which is probably fortunate, for they eat everything and anything in large quantities. We've even had a raven plunk down on the feeder, but I guess they prefer raiding the trash cans at McDonald's and scattering the wrappers and papers to the winds.

Late in winter when the temperature begins to warm, redpolls will appear at the feeder, sometimes dozens at a time.

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## Incoming and Outgoing Association Leadership

Welcome to our new President, Michael Kircher. For those of you who enjoyed our garden tour in August, we were able to enjoy the wonderful hide-away garden Michael and Phyllis have created in their Palmer yard. They even have a root cellar tucked away in the garden. Here's a bit of information on Michael for those of you who may not be familiar with him.

Michael Kircher, author of "Microfarming at High Latitudes: A Resource for Small-scale, Cold-climate Food Security", and his wife Phyllis and son Thomas have lived in Palmer for 33 years, coming from Northeastern Ohio via some time living in California. He has been a gardener since childhood, helping his father in the family garden and his mother to preserve the fruits and vegetables they grew. Michael's current interests include setting up a system to collect and preserve local pollen samples starting next spring. He is also attempting beekeeping and likes to experiment with various high intensity gardening methods. He is looking forward to serving the master gardener community.

We cannot thank Rhonda Bowman enough for stepping forward to be our President several years ago. Next time you see her, please be sure shake her hand for everything she's done to keep the association chugging along. Thank you and job well done, Rhonda!

Joan Redlin also deserves a pat on the back for stepping in as secretary! Thank you, Joan!

Welcome to our new Secretary, Dorte Mobley. Here's a bit of information on Dorte for those of you who don't know this busy person.

Dorte Mobley became a Master Gardener in 1994. She was one of the founding members when the Mat Su Master Gardeners got started in 1997 and incorporated in 1998.

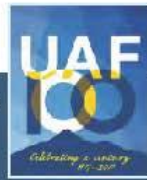
Dorte has been gardening since 1992 here in Alaska and worked one summer for Wilderness Nursery on Trunk Road. She is a member of the Valley Garden Club, where she also did the newsletter for years and was the president for 4 years. She is currently the president of the Alaska Peony Society and a member of the Alaska Rock Garden Society.

Dorte has always liked gardening and enjoyed visiting her grandmother's sister's garden as a kid. When her boys - she has three - were little, they had a large vegetable garden with row after row of peas, carrots, potatoes and of course several rows of flowers, especially dahlias. She also has a rock garden that got started when her husband brought home plants from the different job sites around the state. The large garden became a lawn when the family got heavily involved in scouts but now that all three boys are Eagle Scouts, she has more time for gardening and volunteering her time with the different clubs.

Dorte has been on the Central Mat Su Fire Department for 25 years and is currently an engineer, driving the trucks. She is an EMT and ran ambulance for 10 years. As you can see, she doesn't really believe when people say: "I don't have time for that". You don't have time - you make time, if you want!







*Join us in December as we celebrate the*

*holidays and the university's centennial.*

# Holidays at the Farm



**Friday, December 8 • 3-7 p.m.**  
**1509 S. Georgeson Drive, Palmer**  
**Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center**



Join us as we celebrate the holidays and UAF's 100 years with an open house at the UAF Matanuska Experiment Farm. We'll have:

- Alaska made/grown products from local vendors and 4-H members
- Activities and winter games
- Ice skating on the front lawn
- Tree-lighting ceremony at 6 p.m.

*There is no cost for this event. Fun for the entire family!*



Please call the Cooperative Extension office  
at 745-3360 with any questions.

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Dark-eyed juncos come back early and feed, as well as pine siskins. Indeed, it is a pleasure to observe all these birds at close range.

That brings up our summer birds, which seem to really appreciate the habitat we've left for them and inadvertently created for them. Spruce, birch, cottonwoods, aspen, native ash, alders - all provide food and shelter. Devil's club, elderberries, high bush cranberries, and currants are native shrubs that do likewise. Tall native grass and weeds are part of the wild habitat. The woods turn into a veritable jungle with a myriad of hiding places for small birds. Crabapples bearing pea-sized fruit, cotoneasters, lilacs, bird cherries, and honeyberries also provide food and nesting places. Several ground-nesting species find spots at the base of shrubbery and in tall grass, sometimes in clumps of iris and even in hanging baskets.

The peasant was caused to put a screen door on the greenhouse some years ago. It seems hummingbirds spotted flowers blooming inside before anything was in bloom outdoors in early spring. The birds found their way inside and couldn't seem to find their way out. A large exhaust fan that kicks on periodically on sunny spring days certainly isn't compatible with tiny birds. It took some doing to shoo them out, and made it necessary to mount a screen door on the entrance. This brings up a couple of questions. Why do hummingbirds arrive so early when there are no flowers blooming outside and won't be for a couple of weeks? How do they survive?

The peasant went to the internet for answers. It was known that they could go into a condition called torpor, in which body temperature and metabolism drop to lower levels. But these birds are tiny and need to feed often to sustain their bodies. They can survive for a limited time in a state of torpor. After considerable

searching, the peasant found what is probably the answer. Hummingbirds will feed on tree sap. A wind-broken branch, insect damage, freshly cut tree - in short, anything that makes a wound will cause a tree to exude copious amounts of sap in spring. As some of the moisture evaporates the sugar content increases and makes a high energy food akin to nectar. Hummingbirds also eat insects, but these are protein foods and don't provide much energy, but are of value in feeding growing young.

Among the summer birds nesting on the property, the peasant has spotted the following in addition to those already mentioned:

White-crowned sparrow, golden-crowned sparrow, yellow-rumped warbler, yellow warbler, winter wren, spruce grouse [also a winter feeder], tree swallow, robin, varied thrush, Swainson's thrush, fox sparrow, and probably some other small birds which are secretive and more difficult to identify. The peasant considers them all friends.

What about cats? Perish the thought. They are not welcome, especially when birds are nesting and even more so when the young are learning to fly and flutter around and sometimes crash.



Dark-eyed junco nestlings in hanging begonia basket

There you have it. Let's take care of these creatures. While we're at it let's take care of our fellow humans and kick in for some food for those less fortunate.

Thanks, folks.

# CHRISTMAS TREE SELECTION AND CARE

For many people, the holiday season wouldn't be complete without a decorated tree in their homes. While some opt for an artificial tree, nothing compares to the look, feel and smell of a real tree.

Selecting a tree is based on more than just appearance; although buyers must decide on color, branch size and length, tree height and fullness of the crown, they should also consider needle retention and tree safety when buying and decorating a holiday tree. Tree needle retention in the home can be influenced by temperatures that the tree had been subjected to on its journey to Alaska and your home and tree dryness.

## Needle Retention

The ability of a tree to retain its needles after cutting is based on environmental factors and tree species characteristics. Trees sold in Alaska typically are harvested in October in the Pacific Northwest. Field conditions around the time of harvesting will influence the tree's ability to retain its needles. Although harvested trees are usually somewhat dormant, their ability to resist cold temperature damage (accelerated needle loss due to exposure to cold temperatures below 0 degrees F) is limited by the prevailing field temperatures prior to and at the time of harvest. Delivered trees usually have not been hardened off to be able to withstand cold temperatures such as those found in late November and December in Alaska. A tree taken from a showroom (delivered to Alaska unfrozen and kept above freezing) and driven in temperatures below 0 degrees will likely experience temperature-induced needle loss in the home. If possible, avoid transporting the tree outside, even if the tree is wrapped in plastic.

It is important to look at different tree species when considering needle retention, as there are considerable differences between species. Noble, Frazier and balsam firs are very resistant to needle loss, even when the trees become totally dry. Grand and Douglas firs as well as Scotch and lodgepole pines are more

susceptible to needle loss and are influenced by temperature and dryness. Most spruce trees are very susceptible to needle loss.

## Caring for your tree

After selecting a tree and transporting it home, owners will need to make efforts to keep the tree healthy through the holiday season. Many products on the market claim to prolong tree life or prevent needle loss when added to the water in the tree stand. Common additives include aspirin, soda, honey, floral additives and Karo syrup. Testing has shown that these products have no more success than plain water.

Purchase the correct tree stand for your tree and check the water levels often. A general rule of thumb is that trees will need about one quart of water per day per inch of trunk diameter.

Before placing the tree in water, cut about 1/4 inch off the base and keep this surface in water. The wood tissues that conduct moisture to needles are located underneath the bark, but surface blemishes on the bark will not affect water intake.

## Tree Species and Needle Loss

<b><i>Best</i></b>	Noble, Frazier and balsam firs	Very resistant to needle loss
<b><i>Good</i></b>	Grand and Douglas firs, Scotch and lodgepole pines	More susceptible to needle loss
<b><i>Poor</i></b>	Spruce	Very susceptible to needle loss

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**MAT-SU MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION**  
**PO BOX 598, PALMER, AK 99645**

Website: [www.matsumastergardeners.com](http://www.matsumastergardeners.com)

Email: [www.matsumastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:www.matsumastergardeners@gmail.com)

## 2018 MAT-SU MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL FORM

Membership is \$10 for an annual individual membership or \$12 for an annual family membership. **Family memberships are for family members who reside in the same household.** Memberships are for the calendar year – January through December. Please add [matsumastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:matsumastergardeners@gmail.com) to your email address book so that club correspondence is not blocked.

### Mat- Su Master Gardeners Membership Application:

Please PRINT CLEARLY and complete **all** address fields to ensure that our database is current and accurate. Please indicate if this a

New Annual Individual \$10 membership ☐ **OR** a new Annual Family \$12 membership ☐

or if you are **renewing** an individual \$10 membership ☐ **OR** a Family \$12 membership ☐

Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Street Address/PO Box: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Phone Numbers: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Gardening areas of interest: \_\_\_ annuals \_\_\_ perennials \_\_\_ trees & shrubs \_\_\_ vegetables  
 \_\_\_ fruit \_\_\_ landscaping/garden design \_\_\_ other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Gardening information you would like to see in the newsletter or presented at a meeting:  
 \_\_\_\_\_

*Do you consent to having photos of you participating in Association activities posted on the website? Please initial: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_*

*Do you consent to have your phone number and e-mail published in the Annual Yearbook? Please initial: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_*

*The newsletter is published monthly and is available to download and print on the association's website: [www.matsumastergardeners.com](http://www.matsumastergardeners.com) .*

Return your payment and the completed application/renewal to:

Mat-Su Master Gardeners  
 c/o Membership Coordinator  
 PO Box 598,  
 Palmer, AK 99645

**Visit our website for monthly meeting information**

**Lenita Deda, Membership Coordinator~ 745-3413**

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## Tree safety

Always inspect the Christmas tree's base. Make sure the "handle" (the first eight inches of trunk) of the tree is relatively straight. This part of the tree is extremely important when securing the tree in a stand. Make sure removing any limbs attached to the "handle" won't hurt the tree shape.

When decorating Christmas trees, always use safe tree lights. (Some lights are designed only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.) Larger tree lights should also have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb and all lights should be listed by a testing laboratory.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use tree lights. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used.

Check the strands of lights to determine the number of strands that may be connected.

Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, such as fireplaces and radiators. Try to position the tree near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances. Do not place the tree where it may block exits.

Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs.

Adapted from "Selecting and caring for a Christmas tree", University of Alaska, Cooperative Extension Service, unknown author. Original publication available online at:

<http://library.alaska.gov/asp/edocs/2008/04/ocn225867824.pdf>



## Mat-Su Master Gardeners Minutes of the November 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting Submitted by Dorte Mobley

Present were Rhonda Bowman, Steve Brown, Wayne Bowman, Arlene Bowman, Chris Wood, Lenita and Chuck Deda, Bonnie Hager, Michael and Phyllis Kircher, Sue Glenn, Marge and Curt Mueller, Deb and Ken Blaylock, Eva Cohnen-Brown, Cathy Crew, Lois Rockcastle, Marcia Clemons, Dorte Mobley, Ginger Sweeny

Treasurer's report was given by Cathy Crew.

Thank you cards have been received from Heart Reach, Grow Palmer and the State Fair.

Elections were held. Following members were elected:

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| • President       | Michael Kircher |
| • Vice President  | Curt Mueller    |
| • Treasurer       | Cathy Crew      |
| • Secretary       | Dorte Mobley    |
| • Member-at-Large | Marge Mueller   |

Christmas party will be held Dec 4 at Turkey Red at 6 p.m. Budget for this is \$300 that will cover room and meat - motioned and passed.

There will be a \$10 Chinese auction - please do garden related presents. Marge will contact Turkey Red. Club will donate meat - Marge will cook a ham and Deb will cook a turkey.

Guest speaker Dr. Susan Pearlstein talked about the history of the extension office and experiment farm as well as what they currently are doing and what their future plans are. They need people/organizations to take over the display gardens and orchard. They also have a program called "Friends of the Farm" that need help.

Information about their programs can be found on their web site and Facebook.



## Garden Links

### Alaska Botanical Garden

<http://www.alaskabg.org/>

### Alaska Community Agriculture

<http://www.alaskacommunityag.org/>

### Arbor Day Foundation

[www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org)

### Alaska Natural Heritage Program – Botany

<http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/botany/>

### Alaska Farm to School \*\*New\*\*

<https://www.farmtoschoolalaska.org/>

### Alaska Garden Clubs

<http://www.alaskagardenclubs.org>

### Alaska Grown Source Book (online)

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/sourcebook/sourcebookindex2016.html>

### Alaska Master Gardeners Association, Anchorage Chapter

<http://alaskamastergardeners.org/>

### Alaska Master Gardener Blog

<https://alaskamastergardener.community.uaf.edu/>

### Alaska Native Plant Society

<http://www.aknps.org/>

### Alaska Orchid Society

<http://www.akorchid.org/>

### Alaska Peony Growers Association

<http://alaskapeonies.org>

### Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

<http://www.apfga.org/>

### Alaska Plant Materials Center

<http://plants.alaska.gov/>

### Alaska Rhodiola Products Cooperative

<http://www.alaskarhodiolaproducts.com/>

### Alaska Rock Garden Society

<http://www.akrockgardensociety.org/>

### Eat Local Alaska

<http://akfood.weebly.com/index.html>

### Good Earth Garden School

<http://ellenvandevise.com/>



### Grow Palmer

<http://growpalmer.org/>

### Integrated Pest Management Program

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/>

### Junior Master Gardeners

<http://www.jmgkids.us/>

### Landscape Plants for Alaska

[www.alaskaplants.org](http://www.alaskaplants.org)

### Mat-Su Borough Rain Garden Program

<http://www.matsugov.us/environment/raingardens>

### Mat-Su Master Gardener Website

[www.matsumastergardeners.org](http://www.matsumastergardeners.org)

### Master Gardener Research Link

<http://search.extension.org>

### Master Gardeners of the Tanana Valley

<https://fairbanksmastergardeners.wordpress.com/>

### Palmer Soil & Water Conservation

<http://palmersoilandwater.org/>

### South-Central Alaska Beekeepers Assoc.

<http://www.sababeekeepers.com/>

### Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners Association

<http://seak-mastergardeners.org/index.html>

### Sustainable Agriculture – UAF

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ah/sare/>

### UAF Cooperative Extension Service, Palmer

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/matsu/>

### UAF Cooperative Extension Service Publications

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog/>

### UAF Georgeson Botanical Garden

<http://www.georgesonbg.org/>

### UAF CES Citizen Pest Monitoring Portal

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/cmp/>

### UAF School of Natural Resources

<http://www.uaf.edu/snre/>

### University of Saskatchewan Fruit Program

[www.fruit.usask.ca](http://www.fruit.usask.ca)

### USDA/NRCS Plant Data Base

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/>

## Announcements

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Submit an article to the newsletter

Volunteer to head a committee

### Committee Chairs/Coordinators Needed:

- Speakers for Monthly Meetings
- June Plant Sale
- Colony Days Parade
- Summer Projects
- Summer Garden Tours
- Yearbook Coordinator - Kristina Tornqvist

## CLUB CONTACT INFO

<b>President:</b>	<b>Rhonda Bowman</b>	<b>746-2948</b>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>Curt Mueller</b>	<b>745-6144</b>
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Joan Redlin</b>	<b>206-604-4676</b>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	<b>Cathy Crew</b>	<b>632-4401</b>
<b>Member at Large:</b>	<b>Marge Mueller</b>	<b>745-6144</b>

If you have gardening news, photos or information you'd like to share in the newsletter, please contact Deb Blaylock at her email: [kdblalock@ak.net](mailto:kdblalock@ak.net)

Website: [www.matsumastergardeners.com/](http://www.matsumastergardeners.com/)

Email: [matsumastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:matsumastergardeners@gmail.com)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### NOVEMBER 2017

**Dec 4, Palmer, MMG Mtg, Annual Christmas Party & Potluck**

**Dec 8, Palmer, Holiday at the Farm**

### JANUARY 2018 AND BEYOND

**Jan 8, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Jan 26 & 27, Anchorage, Alaska Peony Growers Association, 2018 Annual Conference**

**Feb 5, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Mar 5, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Apr 2, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**May 7, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Jun 2, Palmer, Annual Plant Sale (Tentative)**

**Jun 8 - 10, Palmer, Colony Days**

**Jun 9, Palmer, Colony Days Parade**

**Jun 4, Palmer, Palmer Library Planting**

**Jul 2, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Aug 6, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Sep 10, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Oct 1, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Nov 5, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

**Dec 3, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD**

Please let Michael know if you have any ideas for future meeting topics. Members are welcome to offer to speak or reach out to speakers of interest to the club's membership. The club would welcome a speaker coordinator - if interested contact Michael.

## Club Membership

The membership year runs from January to December each year. Annual individual memberships are \$10 and family memberships are \$12. Family memberships are only for family members living in the same household.

Join or renew online

*Thank you*

## How and What to Submit for the Monthly Newsletter

Your submissions are greatly appreciated and make our newsletter what it is - so don't be shy about submitting items for publication.

However, there are a few rules which we all must pay attention to:

Articles, stories, poetry, upcoming events, and pictures (garden-related) are gladly accepted for inclusion in the newsletter. Please submit pictures in JPEG format and other items in Word format with no special formatting other than paragraphs. When submitting pictures, please provide a brief caption or explanation as to who or what is in the picture. I do not have a scanner to copy pictures so I cannot accept hard copies.

If you are not the author or photographer, please ensure you have permission of the author or photographer to use their material in the newsletter. The newsletter publisher is not responsible for obtaining this for you.

Please do not provide magazine articles or pictures from the internet unless they are public domain items.

**Deadline for submission of articles and info: 20<sup>th</sup> day of each month -- Thank you--**



December 2017



Like us on  
**Facebook**

Website: [www.matsumastergardeners.com/](http://www.matsumastergardeners.com/)  
Email: [matsumastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:matsumastergardeners@gmail.com)

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