



I-Plants™

LAST MINUTE HOLIDAY ISSUE

The On-line Magazine for Interior Plantscapers and Allied Associates

Published by Johnson Fediw Associates

Kathy Fediw, LEED AP, CLP, CLT, President

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From the Editor:



[Kathy Fediw, LEED AP, CLP, CLT, President](#)

OMG, just got word that Interiorscape magazine has shut its doors for good! I have the greatest respect for Jeff Morey and what he has done over the years to support the interior plantscape industry. For over 30 years he has published this fine print trade journal and his Interiorscape message board. He has contributed to the trade associations, conferences and trade shows and continued to do that even when it was no longer profitable for him. We at I-Plants and Johnson Fediw Associates wish him, his family and staff nothing but the best as he moves forward and concentrates his efforts on the rest of his business.

As for I-Plants, Barb and I and the rest of the gang will be here for you! We have plans to continue to expand the magazine, add more writers and articles, and bring you the news you need to manage your business. This is your magazine and we pledge to keep it that way! So send us your ideas and suggestions and we'll be happy to incorporate them into our format.

Time marches on, and in just a few short weeks you'll start installing poinsettias, Christmas trees, lights and an array of holiday décor. So this issue is devoted to Last-Minute Holiday—what you need to know now to prepare, and what you'll need to know in a few weeks when the madness begins. Check out Barb's article on preparing for the holidays, plus our two articles on your favorite plant, poinsettias. Be sure to make copies of "Ten Tips for Poinsettia Care" on page 5 and distribute to your installers and techs in time for that first delivery.

So sit back, read on, **click on** and enjoy this our last issue for 2010! We start back up again in January 2011 with our special TPIE edition.

Kathy Fediw, LEED AP, CLP, CLT

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10 Tips for Poinsettia Care

by Kathy Fediw, LEED AP, CLP, CLT
Johnson Fediw Associates



Clients want their poinsettias delivered early, often just before Thanksgiving, but may not be able to afford a second rotation. These tips will



help you keep your poinsettias looking their best for as long as possible during the holiday season!

1. Open and unpack poinsettia boxes ASAP. Ethylene gases trapped in boxes cause poinsettias to droop. This condition is called epinasty and can make your poinsettias look old long before their time. Store away from exhaust fumes and gas heaters which can also emit ethylene gas.
2. Handle with care. Poinsettias bruise easily, and leaves and bracts are easily damaged. Carry and handle them gently. No grabbing by the sleeves and do not drop the boxes! The roots are delicate, too and break off easily.
3. Keep the soil media slightly moist, not too wet and not too dry. Water as soon as the surface feels powdery dry. Over-watering can lead to rot, under-watering causes wilting.
4. Use a wetting agent or subirrigation to cut down on watering needs. Eliminate that extra visit by using a wetting agent, capillary matting, or other type of subirrigation system. (See our article "Poinsettias on a Two Week Schedule" on page 9.)
5. Protect poinsettias from the cold and from drafts. Do not leave poinsettias on a cold loading dock or in an unheated truck. Poinsettias are tropical plants and need to be kept warm.
6. Make sure each poinsettia has a water-proof saucer or container. Foil is not enough! Avoid costly insurance claims by using deep-dish saucers or plastic containers.
7. The real "flowers" are the nubs at the center of the colorful bracts. The nubs should be closed when you install your plants (a sign of a younger and fresher plant) and will open as the flowers mature. Male nubs or flowers will have pollen and female flowers will have a drop of nectar.
8. Keep water off the leaves and bracts. Water (especially cold water) can leave ugly black spots and lead to diseases.
9. Have a clear replacement and disposal policy with each client. What will happen if poinsettias don't last until the end of the season? Does your client want you to give old poinsettias to employees to take home, donate them or dump them?
10. Be diligent in removing dead and dying leaves, bracts and flowers. Keep your poinsettias looking fresh and healthy for as long as possible.



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Last Minute Holiday

With Barb Helfman, CLP



LEASE OR RENTAL

The pumpkins are in the grocery stores; you have last year's trees and wreaths in the warehouse. Yep, it is time to get ready for Holiday 2010. So, where are you, may I ask? Are you, will you be ready?

DÉCOR

Have you received the entire product you have on order? If not, now is the time to call your suppliers and see when it should be arriving. In past years you placed orders in January or February and the stuff miraculously showed up on your doorstep as ordered. This year I caution you to do your homework. The one thing you do

not want is to find out October 1 that the stuff is "on the water" and may not be here in time or at all. I'm hearing that shipping from China is unreliable and many importers are struggling. It takes just a few minutes to verify delivery dates and if

there are going to be problems it is still early enough to substitute one gold ball for another.

Another option for replacement materials or even stuff for a new unexpected job is to visit your local chain store retailers. Truth is, they buy product from many of the same importers we do, just more of it. And because they buy so much stuff, their prices are often very comparable to what we pay. Why not let them be your wholesaler even if it is at retail? They have discount days, etc. that you can take advantage of as well. But, if you don't know who has what, you cannot know where to go when you need 2 more 10 foot trees or more gold balls. So, stop by and mentally note who has what.



STAFF (or Holiday Elves)

Your regular staff is already taking care of plants on jobs so they tend to cringe as Holiday rolls around. They know it means more work, late hours, hanging off ladders. Most look forward to an extra bit in their pay envelope as overtime kicks in. All well and good, but when people get tired and stressed accidents

can happen. I suggest planning right away for additional muscle and decorating hands.

One year one of my tech's husband, a fire fighter, asked his fellow firemen if they would like to work part time putting up garland and setting up trees. They would! Next thing I knew 3 of the cutest, well-muscled guys showed up for the Big Thanksgiving Weekend Install. They were familiar with ladder work and by pairing them with someone who had the design knowledge, several of my trickiest installs were a piece of fruitcake! Just remember to pair them with people who know the property and have the other necessary skills, preferably someone who had already installed the job in past years. (Note: be choosy, firemen have a tough job and some are less mature than others and are more interested in partying on their days off than working.)

Another resource for extra decorating hands were a group of older women who had a Quilting Group at our local church. As they sat in our warehouse replicating swags that our designer had shown them how to fabricate, it was a joy. They loved it. Again, there is a caveat. Don't expect them to decorate from "scratch". Have your designer do the prototype and them have them mass-produce. One of the keys to an almost effortless Holiday is to have "elements", larger pieces made of ribbon, artificial, ornaments etc that can be placed on trees and wreaths in one motion instead of placing one ornament after one

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ornament after one ornament. Saves a huge amount of install time.

THE 80/20 RULE OF HOLIDAY DECORATING

If there is one thing I learned over 25 years of Holiday is that if you do a "custom" look for each client, you will never be able to grow your Holiday Business effectively. Let's be honest. Most clients want the traditional red/gold or burgundy/gold look and most only have the ceiling height for a 7.5-foot tree. In today's economy, most do not have the budget for the over-the-top design. Your best bet is to KISS. Sally at EconoPak doesn't see the tree you install at another client's office lobby. Replicate the same look. Yes, it needs to be beautiful, but to have 25 all different trees in 25 locations takes too much time and buying different ornaments for each is costly. Again, KISS. Eighty percent of what you do can be similar or the

same. The other 20% need to be custom and unique be it through color, props or ornaments.

LASTLY, TAKE DOWN

This year, take a look at how your Holiday Product was stored and make plans now to improve this year. I know you are tired. I know it is a great temptation to just shove the stuff out of sight. Don't create a nightmare for next year's install. Label, pack, hang, and label again. Ornaments that were not used and still in boxes still need an ornament taped to the outside of the box so you know what is in it. Jobs that always go out first need to be stored last and easy to reach.

NEXT YEAR

Yes, Virginia, there will be a next year. Plan for it. And, while your Holiday is up, take pictures and put in the file. Stand with your contact and talk about next year and how

to add or change. Go look at your competitor's Holiday and take pics so if you want to approach that client for the future you know what has been done in the past and can ask some pertinent questions.

BOTTOM LINE

For the savvy interiorscaper, Holiday is just another recurring revenue money stream. It only differs 'cause it happens once a year instead of monthly. Planning and Organization is the key. Now go out there and get 'em, Holiday Tigers.

Barb Helfman, CLP, is a well-known icon of the interiorscape industry, the inventor of Topsiders planters and the sole distributor for Joey Pouches and Freedom Squares. She can be reached at www.Topsidersinc.com



All teleseminars qualify for 1 CEU each for PLANET Landscape Industry Certified Professional (CLP-I and CLT-I) recertification!

Today's Teleseminar:

October 12: GPGB LEED Update with president Mike Lewis

ALL proceeds from this session will be donated to Green Plants for Green Buildings!

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Poinsettias on a Two-Week Schedule

by Kathy Fediw, LEED AP, CLP, CLT

Poinsettias are tough enough to keep looking good for weeks on end during the holiday season. Unpredictable weather and other challenges can wreak havoc on these delicate, cold-sensitive, water-hogging plants. If your maintenance program is on a two week schedule the challenges become even more pronounced. So what's an interior-scaper to do?

Keep in mind that the success of any of these methods depends greatly on where the poinsettias are located and the light, temperature and presence of any drafts will affect your success.

When ordering, check the measurements of the bottom of your saucer or waterproof decorative container so you order the right size. Many saucers and containers taper to the bottom, so the bottom diameter may be smaller than the top diameter. So a 6 inch saucer may only be 5 ½ inches at the bottom.

Option 1

One option is to ask clients to water the poinsettias in between your visits. In order for this to be successful you need a client who is willing to do this on a consistent basis and instructions for whomever they assign the task. Put in writing your recommendations for watering and be as detailed as possible. For example: "Please give each poinsettia one cup

of luke-warm water on the following dates: November 22, December 6 and December 20. We'll water them on the alternate weeks."

Option 2

Hire an extra person or two to act as your Poinsettia Team. This person would have a separate route and go around to water poinsettias in between the tech's regularly scheduled visit. This may work for larger companies but may not be practical for smaller businesses. You can also use an existing employee who may be in a different department or who may work part-time most of the year.

Option 3

Use some type of subirrigation. There are many products available for you to use, each has their good points and their limitations, and they are available in a wide variety of price ranges. A few of the most popular ones are:

Cap mats: you'll need to buy rolls of capillary matting and cut it into round or square pieces to fit the bottom of deep-dish saucers, which you'll most likely need to use even with waterproof containers. This is an inexpensive option but the labor costs will increase the price. You may not have enough labor available during the holidays to cut the cap mat into pieces so now is the time to get started on this project.



This works best when the drainage holes on the grow pots are on the bottoms, not the sides, of the pots so check with your growers and distributors. You place the cap mat in the bottom of a saucer and place the grow pot directly on top of the mat. Remember the holes need to be in direct contact with the matting for this method to work. Most poinsettias can get by on weekly watering with cap mats but some may not last the full 2 weeks, depending on location and environment. You can double the cap mat to 2 layers and that may help in some cases. Cap mats can be reused on other plants after the holidays and generally last 6 months to 2 years.

Aquafur™ and Oasis® Disks: these systems are similar to cap mats but come precut, decreasing your labor costs. They also work best on plants with the drainage holes on the bottom of the grow pots. The extra cost is probably worthwhile, especially if you don't have the labor to cut the capillary matting. Poinsettias can go one to two weeks between watering.

Sippers™: these are compressed legs of capillary material formed into "stilts" that are inserted into the drainage holes in the bottom of the grow pots. Please note that the drainage holes MUST be on the bottom for you to use these! You'll

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need a deep dish saucer or waterproof container and 3 to 4 Sippers per pot work best. These will raise the growpot about half an inch so be sure your decorative container is deep enough. Sippers are more expensive than cap mats but will last almost indefinitely and can be reused many, many times. Poinsettias can go one to two weeks with Sippers before they'll need watered again.

CWI Inserts: these subirrigation pots will allow your poinsettias to go two to four weeks or more between watering, depending on the conditions. They tend to be a bit pricey but can be reused over and over again and the savings in labor and repeat visits may make the investment worthwhile. Order your supply now from Tournesol. You will need more labor upfront to repot the plants into the system so be sure to have extra hands on deck early in the season. Decorative containers do not need to be waterproof. Order now.

Water Tech™, Jardinier® and similar subirrigation systems: These systems work by capillary action whereas CWI works by a vacuum system. You will need to repot into the systems so you'll need the extra labor early in the season. Poinsettias can go two to three weeks with most of these systems. Their price is generally between CWI's and Sippers. Decorative containers do not need to be waterproof. Order now to avoid delays.

Joey Pouch: this subirrigation system is a wrap of specialized foam-like material and requires that you take the poinsettia out of its growpot and wrap the rootball in the Joey Pouch material. The system can be pricey and labor-intensive but your plants may make it through the whole season with

just the initial watering. A waterproof container is a must! Order now in case supplies are limited.

There may be other subirrigation systems available so check with your regular supplier.

Option 4

Upcoming Events

OCTOBER:

Tuesday, Oct. 12: Teleseminar, "Green Plants for Green Buildings and the LEED System Update" with Mike Lewis, president of GPGB at 12 noon EST. To register, click or go to (<http://ifaconsultingbiz.com/shop/teleseminars-webinars/>) or call 281-687-6966. Brought to you by Johnson Fediw Associates. **Note: ALL proceeds from this teleseminar are being donated to Green Plants for Green Buildings.**

October 20-21: Landscape Ontario Expo, Toronto, Canada. **Kathy Fediw and Joanne Young will be on a panel discussion** on October 20. To register, click or go to (<http://s31.a2zinc.net/clients/ezlandscape/gardenexpo10/public/enter.aspx>) or www.horttrades.com.

October 27-30: Green Industry Conference 2010, sponsored by PLANET, Louisville, Kentucky. For more information click or go to (<http://www.landcarenetwork.org>)

NOVEMBER:

November 17-19: Greenbuild Expo 2010: Chicago, Illinois, US Green Building Council. For more information on the expo and other programs; or to register click or go to (<http://www.greenbuildexpo.org/Home.aspx>)

JANUARY:

January 11, 2011: I-Plants magazine starts the new year with the TPIE edition—watch your email inbox!

January 19-21, 2011: TPIE (Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition: Fort Lauderdale, FL. Conference and trade show for winter-weary interior-scapers and garden center owners/managers. GPGB training session, too! For more information click here or go to <http://www.fngla.org/TPIE>

Use a wetting agent (or surfactant) such as Yuccah Extract. Wetting agents are concentrated liquids that you add to your water. You water the poinsettia as usual once you've mixed the wetting agent in our can (or use a proportioner with a hose

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*Leann Surz, CLT is Vice President at
Raimondi Horticultural Group, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ*



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or water machine.) Wetting agents make your water "wetter" so it penetrates and stays in the soil media better. This is a quick, easy fix and most poinsettias can go one to two weeks between watering. You only need to apply it once at the beginning of the season, then water with regular water from that point on. Wetting agents can be used on other thirsty plants that are not staying wet long enough between regular maintenance visits.

Using wetting agents along with a subirrigation system may backfire, especially on enclosed systems. The soil may stay wet for too long and lead to rot.

Option 5

Use water-absorbent crystals. These crystals work best when they are mixed into the potting media before a plant is potted up. How-

ever, some interiorscapers have had good results by poking holes in the soil of finished plants and sprinkling a few crystals down into the holes, then covering them up with soil media. The crystals absorb water and increase in size when you water the plant, so a little goes a long way. Excess crystals may float up to the top of the soil and create a gelatinous cover—yuck! The plants' roots are able to draw water out of the crystals as needed and go for one to two weeks or more.

In the past we've also been able to get tubes filled with the same material used for these crystals, with water added to create a Jell-O®-like mass. The tubes are about 4 to 5 inches in length and about the width of a tube of sausage or ground beef. Set them on top of the soil so the material is in direct contact with the soil media. Some people had great success while oth-

ers complained that the tubes were too visible. You may be able to find these at your supplier's but they haven't been marketed to our industry for quite some time.

As you can see, you have many options and you may find that certain options work best with certain clients. Now is the time for any experimenting you may want to do! And be sure to order your supplies early so you'll have them on hand for your first delivery.

Kathy Fediw provides in-house workshops and educational resources for interiorscapers. Visit her website at www.JFAConsultingbiz.com.



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Featured Business:



The Green Earth—Green Plants® program announced earlier this year that Growing Roots, LLC, an interior plantscape business headquartered in Long Beach, California has earned the status of being a “green” certified business for their Long Beach location. “Growing Roots has proven that they are an environmentally-responsible business and operate in an ecologically-friendly manner, says Kathy Fediw, LEED AP, CLP, CLT, president of Johnson Fediw Associates and founder of the certification program.

Jennifer B. Perez is the owner and founder of Growing Roots®. Perez says that becoming green certified has helped grow the business. “We can say with certainty that we were awarded three new service accounts this year based on our green certification when compared to our competition,” says Perez. “We are very happy that we took the steps in becoming green certified. We

can say we were the first in California to be green certified and we use it as a marketing tool every chance we get.”

Perez passed a rigorous assessment and had to provide proof of the company’s operational procedures. The assessment rates an inte-

“We can say with certainty that we were awarded three new service accounts this year based on our green certification.”

riorscape business on their indoor and outdoor facilities, vehicle usage, recycling program, horticultural practices, staff education and giving back to the community.

In the process, they also learned how to make their operations more eco-friendly. “Being green certified helped us review, improve and think about how we can continue to develop our environ-

mentally green practices” says Perez.

“We decided to become green certified through the Green Earth--Green Plants® certification process because we wanted to be able to verify that we ‘practice what we preach.’ We can always say we're ‘green’ and promote the green movement, but do we actually take a constant initiative in our daily business practices?”

“Jennifer Perez and her team scored extremely high in their use of eco-friendly horticultural practices and indoor facilities” says Fediw. “We are proud to recognize their achievements and know they will set an example for other businesses.”

Johnson Fediw Associates is a third-party consulting firm working to make interior plant care businesses greener and more profitable. For more information on Green Earth—Green Plants® go to www.greenearthgreenplants.com. For more information on how Growing Roots can improve the indoor air quality of your office or workspace and for franchise opportunities go to www.growingroots.com or call 562-773-7027.