

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

DECEMBER 2025

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Horticultural Column

The Dark Season

By Harriet Wetstone

The dark season is upon us. That's one of the reasons Thanksgiving and Chanukah and Christmas lights are so important, distracting us from the gloom of its being dark at four thirty in the afternoon! But fire and lights are magical and mesmerizing symbols that have been part of ancient traditions across the world.

Celebrations of the winter solstice (December 21st) mark the shortest day of the year and the longing for long and sunny days. The solstice marks the point at which the sun is at its lowest point in the sky in the Northern Hemisphere. It was a crucial marking point for ancient cultures who tracked time by the stars. Stonehenge, which was built between 3000 and 2500 BC, was designed to align with the sun on solstice days, with the stones in the southwest of the circle framing the winter sunset.

In Viking times, the celebration of Jol featured sacrifices and feasts. In Incan culture, from the 1400s AD there was a grand fifteen-day celebration of the solstice honoring the sun god. Shab-e Yalda is a Persian winter solstice festival that dates to 502 BC in which people gathered with family and friends around an all-night fire, singing and telling stories and eating pomegranates and watermelon - red for the color of the rising sun.

In Japan the winter solstice is known as Toji. The 'yin' energy of cold and darkness is seen at its zenith at the shortest day of the year, balancing the 'yang' energy of warmth and light.

Solstice traditions include hot baths infused with herbs and citrus fruits to ward off bad luck and stimulate the circulation. Traditional foods include pumpkin, carrot, and kumquat. In ancient Rome there was a festival honoring Saturn, the god of farming and harvest, and that included wearing colorful clothes and giving gifts as well as bringing in wreaths of greenery.



I am cherishing my dried arrangements, bouquets of hydrangea and arrangements of dried seed pods; and I am so envious of how many of our members can create gorgeous wreaths. So, I thought it would be useful to look at ways of keeping these things fresh for as long as possible.

First off, it is important to make sure that dried arrangements are not in the sun. Or better yet, away from windows and only in shaded or dimly lit areas.

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Second, and this surprised me, moisture is said to be the enemy of preserving dried flowers. Moisture, high humidity, and fluctuating temperatures can wreak havoc. So, keep them out of bathrooms and kitchens, and away from radiators. Cool, dry, and consistent are best.

I would have thought a quick rinse would be a way to refresh my hydrangeas, but I guess not! I had never thought about dusting them with a hairdryer set on its lowest power and coolest air setting. But you can also use a soft paint brush. And I think we have all heard of using a little hair spray.



But what about keeping wreaths and sprigs of greens fresh and green? First off, be careful when you buy them. A gentle shake will tell you if pine needles are already loose and drying. Make sure they are fully fragrant!!

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As with dried arrangements, keep your wreath out of direct sunlight and away from sources of heat. Wreaths do best outside in the cold. A wreath outside and out of direct sun might last for a couple of months, but indoors or in full sun, only a couple of weeks.

Unlike dried arrangements, wreaths benefit from moisture. Spritz them! You can give them a gentle spray up to three times a day. And, although it sounds like a lot of trouble, it has been recommended that at night you spray the back of a wreath and then cover the face of it with a lightweight plastic bag.

May you all have a warm and wonderful holiday season!!

Thanks to:

<https://www.marthastewart.com/8029018/how-keep-wreaths-fresh>;
<https://brambleandbeyond.com/the-secrets-to-keeping-dried-flowers/>;
<https://www.muchbetteradventures.com/magazine/winter-solstice-traditions/>;
<https://www.history.com/articles/winter-solstice>

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