Happy Holidays

Norla Hesse, MN River Valley Master Gardener

Our long and beautiful fall has finally come to an end. The first measurable snow came on Thanksgiving Day, causing some travel problems but leaving our yards and fields looking white and sparkling. Don’t you just love the first snow of the season!

The fall cleanup is done and now it is time for some new adventures. Visit a local nursery or garden center such as Drummer’s in Mankato or Traverse des Sioux in St. Peter. The colors and the smells are such a treat on a winter day. Venture a little further and visit Donahue’s in Faribault this month to see a huge array of poinsettia’s in all colors and sizes and an assortment of plants such as cactus, ferns, and “itty bities”. (You have to go there to see what they are.) Don’t forget to stop at the Depot Restaurant for lunch! If you are feeling even more adventurous, truck on up to Bachman’s main store on Lyndale in Minneapolis to view the thousands of poinsettias. They have 30 varieties of poinsettias but over 70% are red. The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is a fun place to visit in winter – see the poinsettia “tree” made of hundreds of plants in the Great Hall – available between Nov. 27 and Jan. 3. If you like to hike, snowshoe, or cross country ski, take the Three-Mile Drive (no cars allowed in winter) out to the Sculpture Garden. The December issue of “arboretum magazine” describes this as “Simply Magical”.

All the flowers in our yards and gardens are gone – now it is time to give yourself a gift – and if you are reluctant to do that, send out a hint to someone else to consider giving you a gift of a new houseplant, an amaryllis bulb, a Christmas cactus, or a poinsettia.

It is a proven scientific fact that taking care of a living thing can be good for your health and well-being. If you don’t want to make a long term commitment, then the next time you are at the grocery store, stop on the way out and pick up a single carnation ($1.50 each at HyVee) and a piece of greenery (I don’t know what they charge for that). You probably have a bud vase already and set it close to where you spend most of your time. If you change the water frequently, it will probably last at least a week.

There is nothing like a bit of bright, living color to make you feel good every day.

Christmas is coming and if you need a gift idea for someone, consider a gift certificate to a florist or garden center. The lucky recipient will get to visit the garden center and pick out a plant or bulb or whatever appeals to them or they might choose to wait until spring to use the gift to pick up something for their yard or garden. Holiday time can be stressful – take the time to smell the roses! The seed catalogs will soon be in the mailbox and taking a few minutes to check out all the new choices for spring will renew your confidence that spring cannot be far away.
Good News from the Front

Minnesota's Department of Agriculture has tried for several years to control Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) with a stingless wasp which is its own natural enemy from Asia. This biological control is a preferred method, part of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies that we recommend in many insect and weed control cases.

The wasp kills EAB eggs and larvae, but it originally had great difficulty surviving the winters of North America. The wasps were produced and provided by a USDA parasitoid-rearing facility in Brighton, Michigan. The facility supplies the wasps to states who are fighting EAB.

This year Minnesota's Department of Agriculture released over 182,500 wasps in the Twin Cities metro area and southeastern Minnesota. This is over 5000 more than released in the previous four years combined.

This fall the MDA staff have been able to recover stingless wasps in Great River Bluffs State Park near Winona. The wasps were released in the park in 2011, 2012, and 2014. Since the wasps only feed on EAB and have reproduced for several generations, scientists know that the wasps have found and killed EAB that were living in the park's ash trees.

It is the MDA's goal to continue to expand the use of the wasps as EAB infestations enlarge. The long-term goal is for EAB infestations to have established parasitoid wasp populations that can eventually bring EAB population numbers down to a level where ash trees can survive in the environment along with EAB.

"The MDA is still early in this process, but we're excited that we've been able to recover parasitoid wasps and are hopeful for long-term success," said Jonathan Osthus, MDA's EAB Biological Control Coordinator. "This is the best tool we have at the forest level to combat emerald ash borer."

You can see the MDA's interactive map of wasp releases and infested EAB trees at http://gis.mda.state.mn.us/eab/.

~Information from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture news release, 11/17/15

2016 Master Gardener Calendars
The 2016 calendar is available at the UM Blue Earth County Extension office (204 South 5th Street, Suite 330)
Calendars are available for $12 each and at a reduced rate for Extension Master Gardeners. ($8)
They are a terrific gift that continues to delight throughout the year.