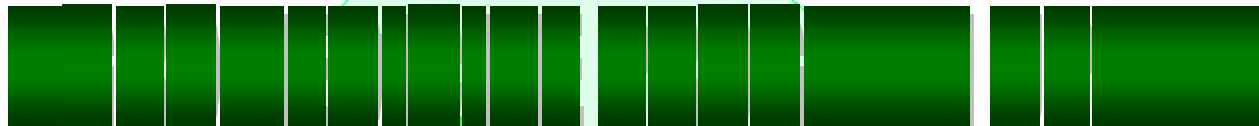


The Newsletter of the Clemson University / MUSC Agromedicine Program



MUSC DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY MEDICINE – DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SERVICE
295 CALHOUN ST., PO BOX 250192-, CHARLESTON, SC 29425

Wm. M. Simpson, Jr., MD, Editor
Simpsovm@musc.edu
843-792-2281 Fax 843-792-4702

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Previous issues are available at www.musc.edu/oem/apunews.html

PROGRAM NOTES

>The joyous celebrations and memories from the past that come flooding by at this time of year remind me of all the folks I need to thank at the close of 2007!

Thanks to all of our Clemson colleagues who have assisted with consultations, particularly Eric Benson, Ian Stock, Jim Rushing, Merle Shepard, John Morse and Bob Bellinger.

Thanks to all Clemson Cooperative Extension Service agents who have made referrals to us and who have invited us to speak to groups around the state.

Thanks to Drs. Byron Williams and Robert Anderson for allowing our residents to rotate through their occupational medicine practices here in Charleston!

Thanks to our administrative assistant, JoAnn Stukes, who has kept the lines of communication open and our newsletter on schedule!

Thank you to our readers and all of our Agromedicine

Program Consulting Physicians. Let us know what we can do to make the Agromedicine Program more helpful in your day to day activities!

Happy Holidays!!



And a Blessed New Year!

RECENT CONSULTS

>**Mold issues** seem to be our most frequent reason for consultations this fall. It is clear that most result from water being where it shouldn't be due to leaks around fixtures or appliances or due to problems with construction. Fixing the leak and allowing the area to dry seems to resolve most problems, though symptoms due to

mold allergy (in the 5-10% of the population that have mold allergies) or mucous membrane irritation, that can occur in anyone with a high enough level of exposure, can take weeks or even months to abate. Air movement and sunlight help to decrease mold concentrations.

>**Dry skin**, in this part of the year when the humidity is low and the heat is on, has led to more complaints about itching without being able to find a culprit insect. Be quick to use moisturizers and slow to suggest an insecticide!

SPECIAL PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

In the spirit of the season, Dr. Ivar Frithsen, Associate Medical Director of the SC Agromedicine Program and I have developed the patient information sheet on the back of this page. The page with live links will also be available on our web site at:

www.musc.edu/oem

Look for more information sheets in future issues!

CHRISTMAS TREE SAFETY

For many of us, the fragrance and beauty of a real Christmas tree make the holiday season special. But, according to the National Safety Council, there are over 400 Christmas tree related residential fires annually.

Whether you head out to the local tree farm to cut your own or just head over to the local tree lot to pick one up, there are some important safety tips to keep in mind.

1. Fresh, moist trees will be less likely to catch fire, so selecting a fresh tree is important. Look for needles that bend as opposed to breaking. There should also be sticky sap on the trunk.

2. To prevent drying after you get the tree home make a new cut about 2 inches from the bottom of the trunk.

3. Keep your tree adequately watered (which could mean using over a gallon of water per day).

4. Use only UL approved lights, check them before putting them on the tree and store lights in a cool dry, place (hot attics can damage electrical devices).

5. Turn decorations off before going to bed or leaving the house.

6. Keep tinsel and metal foil away from electrical outlets.

7. Avoid any combustible decorations and keep open flames away from your tree.

8. Check smoke detectors and fire extinguishers to be sure they are in good working order.

The National Safety Council and South Carolina Christmas Tree Association websites listed below have more safety information including details on picking and caring for a real tree. There is also information about the environmental benefits of having a real Christmas tree.

<http://www.scchristmastrees.org/christmastreecare.html>

<http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/xmastree.htm>

CHRISTMAS PLANT SAFETY

The brilliant colors and textures of Christmas plants make them attractive to children and pets. Are there dangers that parents and pet-owners should be aware of?

Mistletoe stems, leaves and berries contain chemicals that are toxic to the gastrointestinal tract, producing nausea, vomiting and diarrhea if eaten. A small quantity is probably harmless, but deaths have been reported, usually associated

with berry consumption. Because of this toxicity some authorities recommend using artificial mistletoe for decoration in areas where children or pets might ingest berries that fall from a real sprig.

Holly leaves are essentially non-toxic, but berries are poisonous. There is one report in the literature of an ingestion of 20 berries producing death in a child. The berries are bitter-tasting, so large ingestions are rare. The scientific name of the Yaupon holly is *Ilex vomitoria*, so it is easy to guess the type of symptoms produced by ingestion.

The Poinsettia or *Euphorbia pulcherrima* is mildly toxic. Its red and green leaves can cause mild gastrointestinal symptoms (vomiting, diarrhea) if eaten, but severe illness occurs only with massive doses (in experimental animals at least, the equivalent of eating 500-600 leaves). The sap of the leaves and stems can be highly irritating to the skin, so skin should be washed thoroughly after handling any broken stems or leaves.

Remember that Christmas tree needles can be a choking hazard to small children.

The bottom line—keep Christmas plants (and, really, all plants) out of the reach of children or pets who might try to eat them!

Have a safe & merry Christmas!