

# Sustainable New Year's Resolutions

By: Roslynn Brain, USU Extension sustainable communities specialist

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## SUSTAINABLE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS



Challenge yourself to try simple lifestyle changes each month of the new year. Each aspect of sustainable living presented is not only good for the environment, but good for your health and wallet as well. Whether you dust off your bike, explore vermicomposting or simply update your light bulbs, each small change you make can have lasting impacts.

**January:** Lose paper weight this year. Go paperless with your bills and unsubscribe from junk mail through Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service at [www.dmchoice.org](http://www.dmchoice.org).

**February:** Be a cool Valentine. Save on your heating bill and turn your thermostat down while your house is empty during the day. See if you can sleep better with the thermostat down a few degrees at night as well. For other energy saving tips, visit [www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/energy](http://www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/energy).

**March:** Start your (natural) spring cleaning. Make your own cleaning products to minimize toxin exposure, save money and be healthy. For tips and recipes, visit [www.uaex.edu/Other\\_Areas/publications/PDF/MP492.pdf](http://www.uaex.edu/Other_Areas/publications/PDF/MP492.pdf).

**April:** Let rain showers water your flowers. Build garden swales instead of mounds to capture natural water flow. Find pictures, explanations and books on how to do it at <http://www.harvestingrainwater.com/>.

**May:** Be bright with LED and natural light. Switch the light bulbs in your home to more efficient LED lights and use natural light to brighten your home/office. Energy tips can be found at [www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/energy](http://www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/energy).

**June:** Avoid June bugs with natural pest control. Create your own garlic and dish detergent mixture for aphids, or experiment with other natural pest control recipes to improve your landscape and your family's health. Visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in197> for tips on natural pest control.

**July:** Beat the heat with a native or drought tolerant garden. Plant drought and heat tolerant native edibles and ornamentals this year to add natural Utah beauty to your landscape. Browse [www.extension.usu.edu/htm/horticulture](http://www.extension.usu.edu/htm/horticulture) for helpful information.

**August:** Be thrift chic. Prepare your "new" work or school

wardrobe with a visit to your local thrift store. While there, drop off clothes you no longer wear to keep the cycle going. Learn more about how to give clothes a second chance at <http://usuextensionsustainability.blogspot.ca/2013/05/give-clothes-second-chance.html>.

**September:** Head back to school/work with alternative transportation. Opt to bike, walk or ride the bus for your daily commute. Find out more by viewing the fact sheet at [www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/air](http://www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/air).

**October:** Happy Halloworms! Start your own household vermicompost system with red wigglers, a container, bedding, dirt, moisture and your daily food scraps. See Extension's vermicomposting fact sheet at <http://extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/land>.

**November:** Give thanks through local giving. Sign up for a community-supported agriculture program, and buy your Thanksgiving meal from local sources to reduce your family's food print (the carbon footprint associated with how your food was produced and the miles your food has traveled between production and consumption). Find out more about the local food movement at [www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/food](http://www.extension.usu.edu/sustainability/htm/food).

**December:** Give more while consuming less. Reuse newspaper and other paper scraps to make homemade upcycled (converting used materials into new items) gifts for your friends and family. Opt to draw names with family and friends to reduce the quantity and increase the quality of gifts. Host creative craft nights with friends and catch up while repurposing products that are typically thrown away. See Extension's "Reuse" fact sheet at [http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Sustainability\\_2012\\_11pr.pdf](http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Sustainability_2012_11pr.pdf).

For general information on sustainability, visit

# Mistletoe: Our Favorite Holiday Parasite



*Author – Dennis Hinkamp*

“Don’t get caught under the parasite” sounds like good advice any time of the year. Why is it that during the Christmas holiday we give so much attention to a plant that lives off

other plants? And, what is romantic about it?

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant we associate with many Christmas traditions, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. A parasitic plant is one that invades other plants, robbing them of water and nutrients, instead of developing its own root system. Parasitic plants are found throughout the world. A couple invade Northern Utah, although they often go undetected.

"At Christmas time we seem to honor one of the most tenacious parasites around as we buy mistletoe and drape it around our home," Goodspeed explains. "There is a great deal of folklore and myth surrounding mistletoe. The name comes from the ancient belief that the plant somehow spontaneously sprung to life from bird droppings in the tops of trees. The word "mistel" is Anglo-Saxon for dung, and the word "tan" means twig. Thus, mistletoe could be translated to be "dung on a twig." And you thought calling it a parasite was bad?

Mistletoe sounds a little better, especially if you have to kiss under it, he adds. Mistletoe was used in ancient wedding ceremonies to confer fertility and life-giving power on the newlyweds. In other parts of the world it was considered a peace plant. Those who were fighting stood under the mistletoe to resolve their conflict.

Oh well, enough of history. Most parasitic plants contain an organ known as a haustorium that functions a little like a root, Goodspeed says. Instead of growing into the soil, it penetrates the bark and obtains its water and nutrients from its host. Of course, this weakens the host plant and, in severe cases, can even kill it. There are two native mistletoes in northern Utah. Both are dwarf varieties, and not the leafy mistletoe we often use in Christmas decorations. Fir dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium douglasii*) is a parasite to the native Douglas fir, and can attack the sub-alpine firs. Limber pine dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium cyanocarpum*) is not as

common, but occasionally is seen on limber, bristlecone, ponderosa and lodgepole pines.

“Mistletoe does flower, although the blossoms are inconspicuous,” he says. “The flower leads to a small fruit that contains one seed. This fruit is eaten by birds in the trees. Then they deposit the seeds in other tree tops as they sit contemplating the meaning of life.”

Dwarf mistletoe is not common, and since it blends in so well with the host plant’s foliage, it often goes undetected, he adds. It is rarely found in our landscapes and is not considered a major pest in northern Utah.

Enjoy the Christmas holiday with all its traditions. And, just be thankful we kiss under the mistletoe and not a “twig covered with dung,” Goodspeed says.

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## **Ask A Specialist: Do You Have Tips for Choosing Holiday Plants?**

Answer by: Britney Hunter, USU Extension horticulture faculty, Davis County



It's easy to spruce up holiday decorating with live plants. They offer color and texture to decor. Consider these plants that grow well in the home during the holidays.

- Christmas cactus – This succulent is an easy-to-grow indoor blooming plant available in most stores. The blooms are spectacular this time of year and can be found in red, white, pink and yellow. Christmas cactus starts blooming between Thanksgiving and Christmas and will bloom all winter with bright, indirect light. Long, dark nights and cooler temperatures signal flower buds to develop.
- Amaryllis – These bulbs are often sold in grocery stores and home improvement stores, but you can find higher

quality bulbs and unique colors at your local nursery or garden center. Bulbs produce elegant, long leaves, and huge, striking flowers are produced 8-10 weeks after planting, just when you need some cheer in the middle of winter. Amaryllis bulbs grow best in bright light.

- Poinsettia – Poinsettias provide bold holiday color and make a great gift. They can be kept year round, but are very difficult to re-bloom without greenhouse conditions. Poinsettias will tolerate any level of light temporarily, but will eventually decline without bright light.
- Norfolk Island pine – Norfolk pines look like living Christmas trees, and they can support lightweight holiday decorations. The soft, deep green needles look great year round. Norfolk pines prefer bright indirect light, but can tolerate low light for short periods.
- Kalanchoe – These plants are in bloom at most local grocery stores or garden centers in red, pink, orange, yellow and white. This house plant has thick, waxy leaves and bright clusters of flowers that brighten up the indoors and make an excellent gift. Kalanchoe can be grown indoors year round and will re-bloom when nights are long and temperatures are cool, similar to the Christmas cactus. These plants like bright light and can be moved outdoors in the summer.

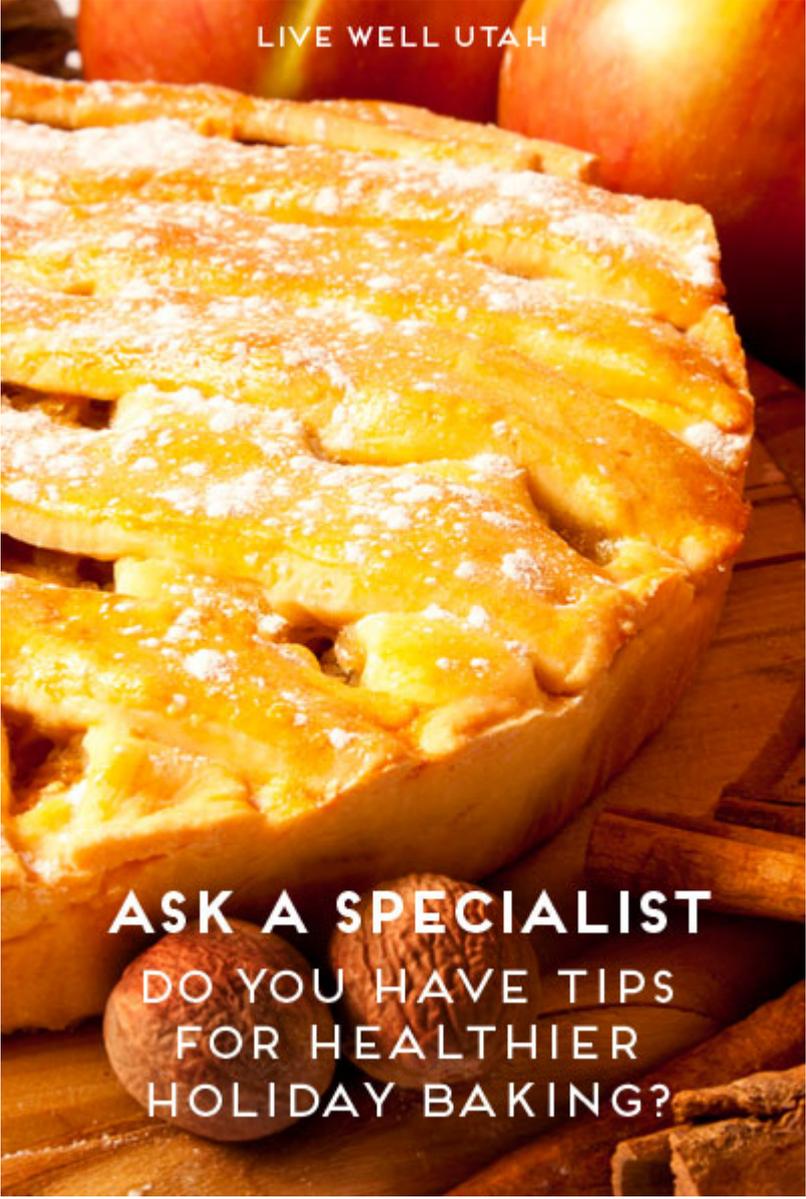
When choosing holiday plants as gifts, poinsettias and amaryllis bulbs are a great choice. Both are traditional holiday plants with lots of color, and they are nice for those without a lot of space because they are generally discarded after they bloom. African violet and orchid flowers also don't take up much space, and they make a showy statement.

**Tips for choosing a holiday plant:**

- Look for short, bushy plants, as they tend to be healthier and maintain their beauty. Inspect plants for signs of disease or insects, and avoid those that look unhealthy.
  - Use a box or similar item to prop the plant up and secure it in the car so it doesn't get damaged on the ride home. Once home, place it where you will remember to water it.
  - Keep potting soil moist by watering one to three times a week, depending on the container size. Smaller pots will need more frequent watering.
  - If the container is wrapped in foil, make a hole for water to drain, or be very careful not to over water. It's easy to accidentally create standing water in closed containers, which can damage roots and create unpleasant odors.
  - Keep your eye out for attractive containers and saucers to re-pot your plants in after the holidays, and have potting soil and indoor plant fertilizer on hand.
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## **Ask a Specialist: Do You Have Tips for Healthier Holiday Baking?**

Answer by: Kathy Riggs, Utah State University Extension family and consumer sciences professor, Iron County



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**ASK A SPECIALIST**  
DO YOU HAVE TIPS  
FOR HEALTHIER  
HOLIDAY BAKING?

Tasty aromas coming from the oven are very much a part of holiday traditions. Maybe it's a special pie or quick bread, or perhaps cookies or muffins. Whatever it is, most folks plan on gaining a pound or two over the holidays because of these special foods. Though it's difficult not to indulge, it's possible to cut back on calories when baking holiday favorites. Consider these tips that will have little, if any, effect on flavor or texture.

\* Use ingredient exchanges to lower fat content. Fruit puree, such as unsweetened applesauce or plain yogurt, can replace up to half the fat (shortening or butter) in a baked item. Instead of using frosting for cookies, brownies or

cakes, substitute a sprinkling (using a sifter) of powdered/confectioner's sugar over the top instead. This significantly cuts fat and extra calories.

\* Increase whole grains in recipes. Admittedly, getting used to whole wheat flour in recipes can take time, not only because of the difference in flavor but also because the weight of the final product can be heavier and harder to digest. It is worth making the change to whole wheat and other grains that add fiber to recipes because of the health benefits. Start by replacing half the flour in a recipe. Another option is to use hard white wheat flour so color isn't the first clue that something is different in the product.

\* Reduce salt. Some baked goods can be very high in sodium. If a recipe calls for a teaspoon of salt, try using a scant teaspoon instead. Then, next time, reduce it even more to one-half teaspoon per recipe. We can condition our taste buds to be more sensitive to the taste of salt so that we can eventually use much less not only in baking but at the dinner table as well.

\* Watch portion sizes. When preparing holiday foods to share with family and friends, consider offering smaller portions. Make cookies a bit smaller or offer only a few pieces of an item instead of an entire plate. Also consider using smaller dinner plates so that portion sizes are automatically reduced as people try to squeeze a little of everything onto the plate.

\* Reduce sugar. While candy making depends on correct amounts of sugar and other ingredients to turn out properly, there is some freedom in exchanging and reducing amounts of sugar in baking. By using one-fourth cup less sugar per each cup in a recipe, the carbohydrates and calories are reduced. If you are tempted to substitute white granulated sugar with a more "healthy" sweetener such as honey, agave nectar or maple syrup, note that these sweeteners still add carbohydrates to

the recipe although they are easier to digest and are more natural.

\* Indulging in foods that are high in fat, sugar, sodium and refined flour for a few days is not an act of diet treason. Those with dietary diseases such as diabetes do, however, need to be mindful of their limitations. Otherwise, enjoy the holidays and try to remain active to burn off extra calories. Make it a goal to implement one or more of the above tips this month, and try to avoid overeating meal after meal the entire month. Overall, be smart, be in control and be sensible when it comes to baking and eating this holiday season.



Kathleen Riggs is the Utah State University Extension family and consumer sciences professor for Iron County. She loves yard/garden work, where her favorite tasks are weeding and mowing the lawn. Her favorite appliance is the microwave oven, and her specialty is microwave caramels. She loves family time and occasions that bring everyone together from near or far.

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## **10 Ways to Enjoy Wintertime**

Author – Naomi Brower



Winter break will soon arrive. Consider some of these fun activities to keep restless kids busy and prevent you from pulling your hair out!

1. **Let it snow!** Even if the snow hasn't started to fall, you can create your own snow. Add baking soda and shaving cream together in a container for a fantastic mold-able snow that is naturally cold. For an added science experiment, add a little spritz of vinegar to make snowballs or snow explosions.
2. **Get crafty.** Make snowflakes or paper chains to decorate the house, homemade stamps out of blocks and shaped rubber shoe insoles or carved potatoes to create your

own homemade holiday cards, or a holiday card holder out of wide ribbon and clothespins. See our Pinterest Winter Inspiration board for lots of other winter craft ideas.

3. **Get cooking.** Try a new recipe, make edible play dough, or create favorite holiday treats and share with neighbors.
4. **Use colored construction paper** to dress each other up like a snowman, Christmas tree, Thanksgiving turkey, Santa Clause, etc.
5. **Build a fort/tower/castle** out of large plastic cups or blankets. Make it a competition (who can build the longest, tallest, etc.)
6. **Have a scavenger or treasure hunt.** For example, search for all the supplies necessary for a fun project, such as, building a fun fort.
7. **Play board games,** race each other to complete simple puzzles, or get active by playing games such as Chinese jump rope.
8. **Put on a puppet show.** For extra credit, create your own puppets out of socks or paper bags to tell a story of your own creation.
9. **Check out the free resources at your local library.** In addition to the free classes or events the library often offers in the winter time, check out a video such as yoga, dancing, or karate and try something new!
10. **Make a memory book.** Take pictures of the fun things you do during winter break or favorite pictures throughout the entire year and create a picture/scrapbook to remember all the fun things you've done together.

Sources:

<http://www.growingajeweledrose.com/2013/01/erupting-snow-recipe.html>

<http://healthyliving.azcentral.com/rules-chinese-jump-rope-2617.html>



Naomi Brower is an Extension Associate Professor for Utah State University. She has a Masters of Family and Human Development from Utah State University. Often called the relationship guru by friends, Naomi is passionate about helping others improve the quality of their lives through creating and strengthening their relationships with others.

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# The Best Wood for Burning

*Author – Julene Reese*



As the weather turns cold and energy costs increase, many homeowners are using firewood as a heating source for their homes.

According to Taun Beddes, Utah State University Extension horticulturist, when looking for the best wood to burn, hardwoods or deciduous trees produce more heat than softwoods or conifers. Other factors to consider when looking for firewood include how much smoke the wood produces, tendency to produce sparks, ease of splitting and how long the wood has been dried.

“As a general rule, wood should be dried for a full year before it is burned,” Beddes said. “If you are going to

purchase wood, find a reliable vendor to be sure you are getting a quality product. Burning wet wood produces less heat since water must evaporate before the wood can burn, and dirty smoke is produced that causes creosote buildup. This can lead to chimney fires.”

Additionally, the resin content of wood impacts the amount of smoke and sparks produced, he said. In general, hardwoods contain fewer resins and produce less smoke and sparks. Of wood available locally, Gamble oak (scrub oak) and bigtooth maple produce the least amount of smoke and burn the hottest.

“If you are planning on cutting and splitting your own wood, the ease of splitting becomes very important,” he said. “Interestingly, this is less related to hardwood or softwood and more to the particular species. Some of the densest woods are relatively easy to split while other softer woods are more difficult.”

Beddes said there are several options available for obtaining firewood. Permits are available for those who want to cut their own wood, and many vendors deliver for a reasonable price.

“Be aware that when purchasing from vendors, hardwoods generally cost about 50 percent more than softwoods,” he said. “Landfills often allow cutting from trees left at their green waste facilities. This can be an inexpensive option because high-quality hardwood can be found from trees such as honey locust, maple and ash.”

In addition, many homeowners advertise free firewood from trees they have felled if someone is willing to cut them up, he said. Construction waste, which is usually softwood, is fine to burn as long as it has not been treated or painted. Many arborists, woodworking and pallet companies offer wood for burning. In fact, arborists can be a source of more difficult-to-come-by hardwood due to the number of shade trees

they remove.

Beddes said to be aware of safety when burning firewood. Chimneys should be swept and inspected at least annually. Avoid burning wet wood, and have sufficient carbon monoxide/smoke detectors. Also watch for information on outdoor pollution levels. When an inversion sets in, the more populated counties in Northern Utah may face restrictions on burning wood.

Information on the amount of heat produced per cord for many tree species is available on the [USU Forestry Extension website](#).

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## **The Best Holiday Recipes**



One of our favorite things to do during the holidays is to bake delicious treats. We give treats out to neighbors, friends, and family, so we always end up needing to make a lot of treats.

While we have a few treats that we have to make every year, it's always fun to find some new recipes to try out.

This year, we are using this pamphlet from Utah State University's Weber Co. Extension – [Kitchen Kreations](#). This pamphlet has a great variety of recipes to try. It has everything from spicy jalapeño spread, artichoke dip, maple-pecan ice cream topping, to chocolate yule log.

[You'll want to check out all these great recipes!](#)