

Tony's Summer Tips 2011



Introduction

Summer is a season of great growth and a bounty of flowers, fruit, foliage and fragrance. I asked people how they saw summer as a gardener – some feared it; the heat, the dryness and the possible damage to their plants – all preventable with wetting agents, mulching and regular watering. Others loved the idea of spectacular summer flowers, fresh basil and tomatoes that tasted of tomatoes and one person said sitting out on a warm evening enjoying the fragrances. Looked at positively, summer is a time to enjoy the garden – the work completed earlier comes to fruition. Do you see your garden in a positive or a negative light? When I go into the nursery I see all the jobs that need doing; the feeding, watering, pruning, potting etc. It's only when I go away for a few days and come back that I truly appreciate how lucky I am and how lovely it is. Often in the home garden people don't appreciate what they have. Sometimes I go to a friend's place and I can appreciate the work they've put in and will comment on how good something is in the garden. We can all take for granted what we have but sometimes we create an oasis or a place away from the hustle and bustle that is ours. We are fortunate to be able to do this but can forget to enjoy it. I see my garden as a living, breathing, changing environment that makes me happy, decorates and protects my house and has created views looking out from my house where every week of the year there is something in it that makes me happy.

NEWS FLASH!

Water restrictions have just been eased to Stage 1 from December 1st. The main difference is that you can now water your lawn (if you need to) at any time with a hand held trigger nozzle or lawns and gardens with a manual system (you turn on) or an automatic system on alternate days between 6am-10am and 6pm-10pm using the odds and evens system. This means it is a lot easier to germinate a new lawn or patch up an old one or maintain a new or existing lawn. You can still water gardens at any time with a trigger nozzle, bucket and watering can.

Lawns

At a recent visit to a friend's place they commented on how disappointed they were in their Buffalo lawn. In the front yard it was as they wanted – short, thick, firm and attractive, but in the backyard it was taller, less even, more splotchy and very spongy. Because of the rain and better, deeper soil out the back, the lawnmower man who came more or less each fortnight was only taking the top off each time and so the lawn was building up on itself (kikuyu does this too, as does couch to a lesser extent). The wheels of his mower ride up on top of the spongy build up and then because of the abundant growth he was only taking the top off. Then there was more rain, and the resulting new growth was patchy, spasmodic and uneven.

Within 2 years the lawn base was an inch or more above the paving and rising. In old inner suburban gardens you used to see the buffalo/kikuyu lawns a foot above the original path it bordered. The solution is first to mow more often (weekly), and mow first one way, then the other (if not every time, then every second time or so). It is also desirable to 'scalp' your lawn annually (usually in March) by mowing it so low (No. 1) you are almost back to bare ground. It looks terrible for a week or so but will be better for the experience. Mid March is ideal as it is still warm enough to promote regrowth, but not so hot as to burn the exposed, scalped base growth of the lawn. If you prune a hedge lightly but regularly, then it changes the way the plant grows – even a vigorous plant will grow slower, bushier and chunkier. A lawn is the same; regular mowing changes the way the warm climate grasses grow. The double mow prunes the bits knocked down by the mower that spring up the next day, giving a more even result. With an old push mower I mowed their lawn a couple of times, but advised they get a new mower man who either comes more regularly, or at least double mows to get the lawn back on track. If you give your own lawn a regular, weekly mow not only will it give you a better looking lawn, but the mowing is easier if done more regularly and the resulting new growth is much more even. If you are feeding your lawn make sure you use a slow release lawn food like Lawn Master or Lawn Builder which promote steady, even growth whereas the cheap and nasty ones dump their fertilizer quickly leading to a feast/famine cycle.

Summer Basics

The more I garden the more I have to remind myself of the basics. I sometimes forget the basics thinking that they don't apply to me or I'm so good a gardener that I don't have to pay heed to the basics. And then it all goes wrong and I realize that the basics are there for a reason. At this time of year the most important basics are to apply a wetting agent to ensure the water penetrates deeply and top with a good mulch that will aesthetically please, help keep water in the soil and will easily break down into humus and condition and improve the soil. Australian soils have a low humus content and it is getting worse instead of better. Humus is organic matter in the purest form and the higher the humus content of a soil the more efficient and productive it is. The succession of dry years we have had combined with intense competition between all the plants in our gardens competing for limited resources result in our soils having lower humus content and thus less efficiency/effectiveness in supporting plants growing in them. If your soil has a high humus content it will have good natural wettability but as it takes time to gain a suitable humus content an application of wetting agent will have an instant effect on improving wettability or water penetration. After 18 months of above average rainfall, I find dry spots in my garden and find in some clients gardens that the water is only sinking 4-6"/100 to 150mm deep. This means the plants are shallow rooted because that is where the water is and if the water isn't penetrating neither is the food. My favourite wetting agents are Saturaid – because it lasts the longest – up to six months, and Seasol with Wetting Agent because it improves wettability at the same time as stimulating growth – particularly root growth.

A good mulch is one that doesn't give your soil indigestion trying to break it down. A good mulch has a balanced or reasonable carbon/nitrogen ratio ie not too woody (any wood-based mulch is bad unless liberal quantities of Nitrogen are applied to offset the imbalance), not too sludgy – lawn clippings. My favourites are Pea & Lucerne Straw, Sugar Cane Mulch, Mulch and Feed (composted fine Pine bark plus Coco peat) or fine Pine Bark. Fine Pine Bark is better than wood mulch especially if it has been chopped into small, digestible particles.

Summer Planting

A lot of the major planting you will do in the Autumn/Winter and Spring months, but some things are better planted in the warmer months and in a warmer soil. In the annuals things like Vinca are no good planted in a cool soil – they will wither and die. The earliest you can plant them is November, but the warmer the better.

Petunias love warmth and if you plant them now you will get a great display in late Summer and Autumn. Impatiens are better planted in a warm soil as are Salvias, late Tomatoes and all sorts of Basil. Often early basil gets a cold night and a setback, but as I'm desperate for the flavour and the first Bocconcini, Basil and Tomato Salad, I always plant some early just to try it. My early basil is still going and starting to really grow now and I will start to plant more. John is the Basil King at Acorn and always plants heaps on Boxing Day - late in my mind but from his large plot we get enough basil to keep the café supplied for about 6 months for pesto and fresh. Also worth a try is Thai Basil and Greek Basil – different flavours for different dishes.

A lot of shrubs and trees prefer to be planted in the warmth of summer and will fail if planted in a cooler soil. Crepe Myrtle, Lasiandra, Hibiscus and Bougainvillea need to be planted in a warm soil, they will need to be planted now to have time to establish themselves before the weather and the soil cools down and they start to regress. Other plants that although transeasonal are quicker to establish if planted in a warmer soil are Port Wine Magnolia (Michelia Figo), Gardenias, Murrayas, Plumbago, many warmer climate perennials like Salvias, Gauras, Lavenders etc are better planted into a warmer soil, will establish quicker with a modicum of care. When I first came into this business plants were bought and sold in kerosene tins, plastic bags or terracotta pots. Roses were only available in Winter, as most were most deciduous trees, as bare rooted plants, or rooted cuttings that needed good care, watering and soil preparation to facilitate the development of a working root system. Thirty five years on we have –PhD's and doctorates done on Container Growing Medium (potting mix) and the growing and culture of plants in containers. The growing is now a science and what I am leading up to is that I would rather plant a rose bush in the middle of Summer with its own fully developed root system able to support the plant, adapt to its surroundings and grow and prosper. Yes it will need good soil preparation and require some regular follow up watering but I would rather plant a fully functioning going concern rather than an iffy proposition that if everything goes well it will hopefully grow. A study was done years ago by the University of Southern California said that a bare root rose was 90% viable in its first 3 weeks of being lifted and then the viability went downhill sharply from there.(which is why our roses are potted within days of being lifted.) If you don't know what you want in a rose then choose one in full flight, look at the colour, smell the perfume and plant a rose you've fallen in love with.

Fertilizing

A nice lady, regular customer who actually reads my notes then asks me questions about them asked me why I go on and on about organic based fertilizers. Inorganic fertilizers are made mostly from fertilizer salts and the main ingredient is usually Ammonia which is cheap to produce but highly soluble and highly reactive (can be used to make bombs). Imagine if you have plant – possibly dehydrated, that is given some fertilizer that is hopefully watered in well (but usually not), the fertilizer dissolves and the thirsty plant sucks up the water that is laden with fertilizer salts. This is like you being hot, thirsty and dehydrated and someone giving you a strong coffee with four sugars. You drink it down and your body absorbs the overly rich solution and you feel ill. The thirsty plant drinks up the water, the high concentration of salts are absorbed into the cells which burst and that tissue dies and has a “burnt” appearance. At best the plant wasn't dehydrated and the fertilizer was watered in well, but as the plant has received a big dose of food in a short time – more than it can cope with, it is a feast this week but by next week the fertilizer has all gone which is feast/famine feeding. How would you go getting your next two months of food in a perishable form and no refrigeration? Eat as much as you can until it spoils and then starve. Organic fertilizer will release its nutrients slowly and the organic nitrogen base acts as a raft to hold and gently release the inorganic parts of an organically based fertilizer. More of the nutrients are available to the plant and less is wasted.

A handful of Blood and Bone (6% nitrogen) will feed a plant better than a handful of Ammonia (18% Nitrogen) the excess Nitrogen ending up in the subsoil turning toxic or filling the creeks, rivers and seas and causing Algal blooms or killing coral. If you charted the release on a graph then the inorganic fertilizer looks like a Xmas tree; sharply upwards as it releases and then sharply down. The organic fertilizer feeds in slowly, releasing steadily over a number of weeks (up to 8) and then tapers off, it looks more like a long box hedge angled down to the ground at each end as it feeds in and then out. Organic fertilizer also stimulate worm and microbial activity whereas some harsh Ammonia based fertilizers can literally fry the worms in your soil and inhibit microbial activity. Also quick release (inorganic) fertilizers will, in the feast/famine cycle, cause softer, lusher growth with thinner leaf epidermis which will make a plant less resilient to disease and pest attack and dramatic environmental variations. In the case of potted plants the excesses of the inorganic fertilizer are like ricocheting bullet in an enclosed space. The Ammonia has got nowhere to go so it bounces around inside that pot cooking the roots / burning the foliage and generally causing mayhem. Most inorganic Citrus Foods now have a “Do not use on a potted citrus” fine print disclaimer on the back of the packet after a couple of disasters ending in legal hands.

Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas have loved these last two wet springs and are looking fantastic at the moment. Remember that with traditional macrocarpa varieties it is always better to have them flowering in November/December than in January/February when it is hotter, dryer and more likely to burn flowers and stress the plant. I prune my hydrangeas in late December/early January after they have finished flowering. The pruned plants cope better through summer, shoot away nicely in autumn and then will set flowers in early spring and flower beautifully in late spring/early summer when the weather is mostly milder and wetter. Winter pruning of hydrangeas (which is an English/Northern European practice where the winters are the harshest season) will promote vigorous growth in spring and flowering in mid/late summer when the flowers are more likely to burn. I prune oak leaf hydrangeas in late winter when they have lost the last of their colourful red leaves. They are much more heat tolerant and resilient and can cope with more sun and more dryness than the macrocarpas. They have creamy white, cone shaped flowers in summer and then spectacular burgundy red foliage from April/May to late winter. Another worth considering is the *Hydrangea paniculata* or PeeGee – pure white, cone shaped flowers on a tall, upright bush with moderate sun and dry tolerance and a spectacular summer display. With all hydrangeas, the better the root system the better the plant. I have seen macrocarpa types in full sun doing beautifully because of deep soil and deep roots, whereas a hydrangea in shallow, poorly prepared soil will cope poorly when the first warm dry spell comes along. When planting any hydrangea dig plenty of compost/manure into the soil to facilitate good root development. Hydrangeas can be mulched heavily without any fear of collar rot – always use a good mulch that will improve the soil and not rob from it, such as pea straw, lucerne, sugar cane, Mulch and Feed or a good fine pine bark. Hydrangeas are more resilient than people believe – just look at how many have survived and prospered since the dry years. They make a great display and a great cut flower.

Vegies

Tomatoes are growing well – sometimes too well. I am pinching out the growing tips of my plants to make them chunkier, bushier plants that will in turn make them more productive. Also keep up the Tomato Dust to keep fungal diseases and caterpillars at bay. When the first fruit has set you can start feeding with a high potash/low soluble nitrogen fertilizer that is a flower and fruit orientated fertilizer not a growth fertilizer. This fertilizer should be used on other fruiting plants like capsicums, chilies, eggplants, cucumbers, zucchini etc. Our All Purpose Plant Food, Fruit and Citrus Fertilizer or even super foods like Blooming Roses and Sudden Impact are all very fruit and flower orientated.

On foliage crops like basil, lettuce, rocket, silver beet etc use a growth orientated fertilizer like Blood and Bone, Dynamic Lifter or normal Aquasol or Thrive. Charlie Carp is dual purpose – another reason to like it. Foliage crops need to be pushed a little bit – a quick lettuce is a sweet lettuce, slow grown lettuce, basil etc is bitter and less flavoursome. Tomato Dust can be used on a lot of plants to prevent pests and disease. It contains copper and sulfur for disease prevention as well as good bacteria that eats bad caterpillars. It is very mild – you would use worse chemicals in every day life – and only has a 1 day withholding period; it is inactive and not at all poisonous after 1 day which is important if you are close to picking your produce. I am happy to use pyrethrum on my basil and parsley that I am eating regularly. Pyrethrum breaks down in 6 hours of sunlight so I spray it in the evening so it is effective through the night against nocturnal caterpillars, in the morning against aphids and it will have broken down by lunch time. Other options are Naturasoap – a high quality horticultural soap that suffocates whitefly, aphids and mites (which are hard to kill with poisons). It is safe and has a 1 day withholding period. If caterpillars are a problem we have Success (also in Tomato Dust) and Dipel which contain good bacteria that will knock the bad caterpillars. Both have one day withholding periods but give ongoing effectiveness. Dipel is proving quite effective against Codling Moth on Apples and Pears and Success is effective against Pear and Cherry Slug.

Planting Under Trees

I often get feedback from customers who have planted a Camellia/Azalea/Rhododendron or other shade loving plant under the canopy of a tree but been disappointed in its poor performance. What they don't realise that is under the ground the big tree has put maximum effort into putting new roots into the hole you've dug for the new plant as it has probably become the wettest, most fertile spot in its area. In a competitive environment the tree realizes that the new hole is the best bit of action in town and directs all its new root growth towards that new area invading and overwhelming the space of the new plant. The plant can't progress because its root system is surrounded by hostile, more vigorous bully roots. If you are planting under a tree and in digging the hole you encounter roots from the existing tree then dig a wider hole – line it with a layer of 10 to 20 sheets thick of newspaper and then refill the hole with soil conditioned/improved with compost/manure. The newspaper acts as a bio-degradable root barrier, protecting the improved soil and root space of the new plant. The new plant is able to spread its root system unimpeded, being protected by the newspaper until it is able to stand alone on its own two feet (so to speak). The other way of protecting an already struggling plant is to root prune with your spade by pushing the spade into the soil at spade depth in a ring ½ meter out from the base of the good plant. This cuts the invading – bad roots of the bully tree, then follow up with a feed of organic fertilizer inside the ring so the food is for the good plant not the bully tree. If you are keen you can do another root prune circle out another 20cm or so giving the good plant more breathing space. About every three months use the spade again to prune the bully tree roots – perhaps in a widening circle so that you are giving the new plant some breathing space and the ability to form its own competitive root system. Again once the plant has developed its own root system it is able to stand on its own two feet (metaphorically) and is able to cope much better with the stronger, more aggressive bully tree.

Screening Bad Views

A common problem is people finding out that there is a second story extension painted purple next door or what was a Californian Bungalow on a big block, is now going to be 3x2 storey town houses. The natural reaction is to plant a row of 20 big, strong, quick growing things that will just blanket screen the bad view. What people don't realize is that if there is nothing to engage the eye (nothing interesting) then the eye will travel on to the next thing – possibly the bad view. It is much better to engage the eye with an interesting view – ie you create the view.

Good garden design is about leading the eye around the landscape and making it look at what you want it to look at. If the eye sees a blank fence or a boring hedge or worse still is trapped into an empty corner it is looking at an unattractive view which then means the eye will travel on to find something to engage it. Some great landscapes have avenues or very structured views created to direct the eye towards the feature where the eye is to rest. Difficult in the home garden but you need to think about what you don't want to look at and what you do want to look at. The worst screen is a row of conifers; sterile, don't engage the eye – not pleasant to look at. I have used hedging in my garden but I've always teamed it with bigger rounder plant/trees in the corners or a second (or third) layer of planting in front to either add layers of depth perception. The best way to draw the eye away from a horrible view is to put 2 or 3 layers in front of that view, then the bad view becomes the 3rd or 4th perspective and therefore hardly noticeable. If you only have a narrow space to plant then you have to mix it up a little, but not too much, for example; if you have a bad view and room for 6-7 plants, then you need a tree (prime plant) that is not too big and not in the middle of the planting, but usually 1/3 of the way along, then 3-4 medium (2-3m) hedging/screening plants and then 1-2 tertiary plants that are foils or visual diversions to break up the view. Another options that works well is to have a full, upright tree as every 3rd or 4th plant, with smaller (2-3m), bushy, evergreen shrubs in between, such as Camellia, Michelia, an interesting Lilly Pilly, Portugese Laurel etc. These will provide a screening layer 12 months of the year. Even a 2 layer/2 plant planting is far better then the row of conifers, especially if there are seasonal changes such as deciduousness and flowering, these changes are good and add interest. People think that deciduous plants disappear in winter, but an interesting branch structure is still a very effective foil to a bad view. And again, the seasonality of the plant means that it is far more effective as a screen than a sterile plant. If you are still not sure then measure the space, make a note of where North is (for sun/shading) and even better still take a couple of photos of the area from where you see it on your mobile phone or digital camera. A picture is worth a thousand words, the more information you give us the more we are able to help you get the right result. We employ 7 qualified horticulturalists with between 20 and 40 years experience each. It's a resource that you'd be mad not to use! We are always trying to recommend plants that we would use in our own gardens, not stuff we have 10,000 of in the back paddock and need to move in a hurry.

10 Favourite Summer Plants

- **Crepe Myrtles:** tough, drought tolerant with up to 100 days of flowering. Terrific autumn foliage, lovely polished bark on bare trunks in the winter and burgundy red new growth in Spring. Hardy, attractive and year round appeal.
- **Roses:** roses are great in summer. More suitable conditions mean masses of flowers over a long period. Hardy, reliable, colourful and often fragrant, pickable flowers.
- **Lawns:** a green, mown lawn will set off the rest of the garden a treat. They can produce enough oxygen to sustain a family of 4 and will lower the temperature around your house in summer, while giving your family a people/pet friendly recreational space!
- **Gardenias:** my gardenias have just come into their own, and my floridas will flower from now until June. We love to have their scent in the house and I'll keep the food and water available to them to keep them flowering.
- **French lavender:** the hardiest, longest flowering, longest living, best performing lavender of them all.
- **Hibiscus:** deciduous or evergreen, Syrian or Tahitian – nothing says summer like those big, bright, beautiful flowers. Loves a sunny, well drained position against a wall with lots of good organic matter dug in for best results.

- **Salvias:** ornamental Salvias are generally heat lovers and are at their best in summer and autumn. Favourites are Anthony Parker (big and beautiful – deepest, darkest violet blue), Wendy’s Wish (the best pink Salvia), the various Salvia nemorosa varieties and even the seedling varieties.
- **Hydrangeas:** when pruned properly, the macrocarpas flower in Nov/Dec, and then the oak leaf hydrangeas flower, followed by the paniculatas (Pee Gees). They provide great colour and are great space fillers. Also remember the repeat flowering Endless Summer varieties which flower on for ages.
- **Murraya:** lush green foliage, fragrant flowers, makes a great hedge in full sun or moderate shade. A very attractive, very versatile work horse. Look at ours.
- **Grafted gums:** the new grafted gum trees are a much better, much more reliable and much more colourful gum than ever seen before. They are grafted onto a less invasive, less problematic root system so we know the size they’ll grow to (between 2-5 meters) and we know the colour they’ll be. You will end up with a hardy, spectacular small to medium tree.

Quick jobs

- Prune off dead rose flowers to a bud, feed, and you’ll have new flowers in 6-7 weeks.
- Lightly prune (take 10-15% off) large flowered Clematis after flowering, feed with rose food to encourage new growth and subsequent summer flowering.
- Keep feeding gardenias with Harry’s Gardenia Food to encourage new growth and flowers right through summer.
- Lightly trim citrus, especially lemon and limes to encourage bushier growth that is more productive. All this rain has produced much soft, sappy growth – it looks lush but is not the sort of growth we want. Inspect closely for any galls (thickening lumps on stem with woody stripes on an otherwise green stem) and cut out immediately.
- Get some colour and interest at eye height by planting a basket with spreading petunias, calibrochea, bacopa, strawberries or for shady spots try impatiens, fuchsias or tuberous begonias.
- Trim and feed delphinium to keep new growth and new flowers coming, they can flower for months.
- Stimulate compost heap with a vigorous forking, a handful of blood and bone and some water if dry.
- As weather warms and fuchsias have finished their first flush of growth, prune by up to 50% by late December/early January and feed, they cope better in their reduced state through the hot months and will look terrific right through March, April and May.
- Lightly prune hedges regularly to encourage bushier new growth, a more pleasing shape and a plant retrained to grow in a bushier habit, rather than an open, leggy habit.
- Dust tomatoes, water regularly and dose with lime if you haven’t already to prevent blossom rot – a black bruise/rot at the base of the fruit.
- Pinch tips out of tomatoes to encourage a bushier more fruitful habit. Feed with a high potassium flower/fruit oriented fertilizer. Do the same with capsicum, eggplant, cucumber and zucchini.
- If you need to prune Japanese Maples to improve shape, do it now as it will bounce back quickly from the prune without any repercussions. Pruning in winter when dormant often results in dieback and uneven growth in spring.
- After Christmas if you’ve used a potted, Christmas tree, put it outside in the shade for 3 weeks and feed, allowing foliage to adjust to being outside and to harden up before being exposed to the full January sun. Foliage softens while inside and must be gently allowed to toughen up its leaf epidermis, an immediate jump into the full January sun will burn softened leaf tissue.

Lavenders

Summer is the main season for pruning lavenders, depending on variety. Italian types or horned lavenders that flower in winter/spring are pruned in late spring (Nov/Dec). English lavenders we prune after their main flowering which is in Nov/Dec or even Jan. French lavender can be cut back at any time you have two warm growing months ahead for it to have a recovery flush of growth (late Sept to late Feb). French lavender can flower all year round but it is at its slowest ebb in the growing cycle in January and that's when I do my main prune, with a light tidy up prune in September. French, along with the horned Italian hybrids are at their best and most valuable in winter and so the summer prune ensures they will be at their best come winter. There are a couple of basic rules with the pruning – it should be done right from the start of the lavender's life – most people let their lavenders become woody in the first year or two, consigning the lavender to a shorter, less productive life. I like to prune lavenders hard from early on, but never to bare wood – they don't shoot away well if at all. You need to prune above the lowest layer of green, viable foliage. This foliage will draw sap up to the dormant buds and the plant can reshoot away fairly easily. Lavenders need to be rejuvenated by pruning to ensure a longer, more useful and more attractive life. They like sunny, well drained positions (plant lavenders up on a mound, or on a ridge for lavender hedges), they are happy with a neutral to slightly alkaline soil, so it can be useful to add some lime.

Disease alert

This year we have had incredible rain fall and with it the resulting humidity. This creates ideal conditions for fungal diseases. We have already seen a lot of black spot on roses. This started 7-8 weeks ago and there is more to come given recent conditions. Tomatoes are also likely to be affected, as are cucumbers and zucchinis – dust with Tomato Dust. Fungus gun is ideal to treat most disease problems on most ornamentals, whether it be a rose with black spot or a geranium with rust.

Secateurs

When I started at Burnley Horticultural College in 1978 we had to buy a pair of Felco No. 2 secateurs as part of our booklist at the special price of \$55. There was an uproar as we poor students had to buy these expensive secateurs. I still have these original Felcos and although no longer pretty, they still cut beautifully on their original blade. Looking back I was grateful I started out with the right tool. I hone the blade once or twice a year and I can prune for hours on end without any impact shock on my hand or forearm, they cut more and bigger branches with less effort than any other secateur I've tried (except the pneumatic powered ones). As we get a little older, more prone to arthritis, carpal tunnel or just not quite as strong, the good Felcos make life so much easier. I use Felco No. 2's (for a large hand) but there is a Felco No. 6 (same as the 2 but reduced to fit a smaller hand). We sell these, with all the replacement parts and holsters, as well as the budget Felcos which are also very good for the price. A pair of Felcos would be a great gift for yourself or for an older person who wants their pruning made easier.

Poinsettias

Because Poinsettias are so strongly associated with Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere winter, we want them for decorations for our Christmas too. The only problem is that they naturally colour up in winter, reacting to cooler and shorter days. What we do is trick them into thinking the days are getting shorter and cooler and they colour up for our Christmas. They can hold their colour inside for many months, or they can be planted outside in well drained areas under the canopies of evergreen shrubs where they will receive early morning or late afternoon sun. They are great as a long term pot plant, but don't over water them, they are Euphorbias and as such don't like wet feet.