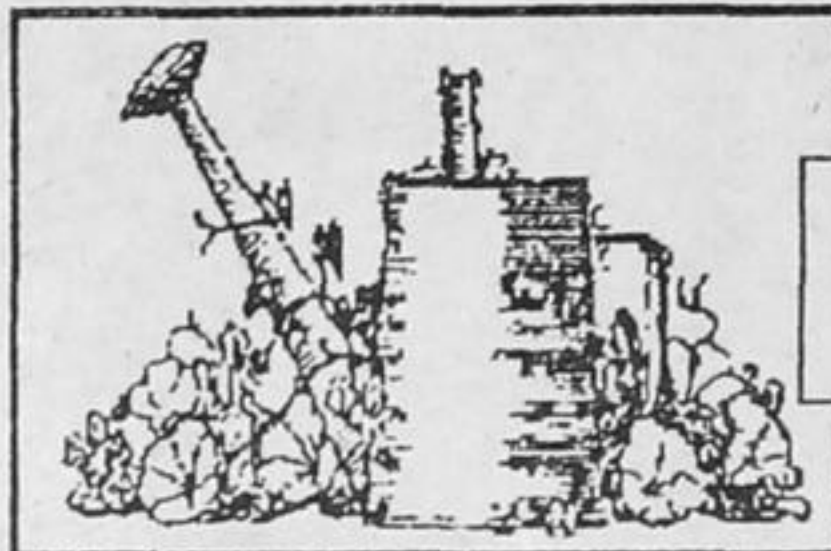


# Simply Gardening



Doug Green

This is the time of year when I am supposed to write my annual how-to-take-care-of-your-poinsettia column. Nobody tells me to do this every year but it seems that many people continue to have problems with this seasonal plant; I feel some sort of obligation to repeat myself year after year. If you require the long version,



if you have not read any after care information on Poinsettia, then go to the Elgin library and read last year's Lantern for the full story. This year, its the short version! Are you ready? Keep them damp but not wet, fertilize them with houseplant food, give them as much light as you can, keep out of drafts - both hot and cold, try to keep them between 60-70 degrees F., don't carry them around outside without a protective wrapper and finally do not give them to a person who

hates plants because this insensitive person will likely do all of the above. That's it, the annual short version of how to keep your poinsettia alive and thriving. Perhaps next year

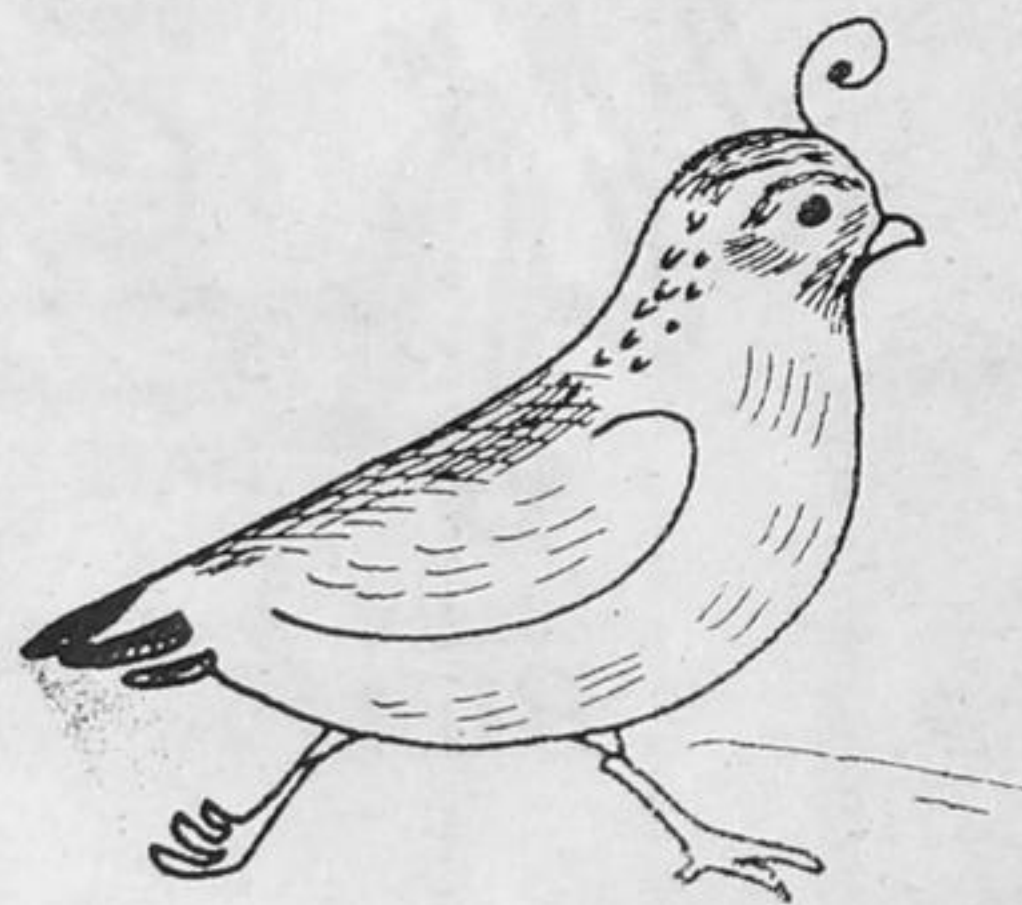
I'll do the long version again; I have to confess though that the short version is so much easier and quicker. Well what else can we talk about this month if not the Christmas plant. How about keeping tender plants alive over the winter? It seems that many

people have not heard of anti-dessicants. These waxy coatings that we can spray onto the leaves of plants such as Rhododendrons, Lavenders and tender Evergreens help keep the plant from losing water during the winter. By putting a thin coating of tough biodegradable wax onto the leaf surface, water is prevented from leaving the plant. This prevents leaf scorch and that resulting leaf browning and dying that we see next spring. Dwarf Alberta Spruce are

particularly sensitive to this drying out and last winter a lot of Cedar and Yews were particularly hard hit. I know that our Yews in the front yard lost a whole seasons growth to scorch. Not this year folks, I sprayed my plants very well during that last warm spell in November. You can still spray your plants if you do so on a day when the temperature is above zero so the water in the mix will evaporate and not freeze. If you can not get it done before Christmas, it can still be done on those warm days in February (when the plant damage is really done). Typically, anti-dessicants will last for 3-4 months before they are worn off. They do not hurt plants or the environment and are a welcome sight to my eyes (you can't see them) when compared to the hideous sight of burlap wrapped Evergreens. Why people plant Evergreens and then cover them up in the winter when we need the colour is beyond this gardeners understanding. The All America selections have been released for this year and to my amazement there is not a single

Petunia among the list. We do however have Watermelons, Squash, Gazania, Pole Beans, Pansies, and Vinca. Next month I will go into some more detail about these new plant gems but this month, let me just tell you a little bit about Vinca. Vinca is the up and coming plant of the 90's. It is very heat tolerant, flowers all summer long (its an annual), does not need a lot of water, performs well in the low annual garden, in hanging baskets, or in containers growing on the hot deck. It has a succulent type of leaf and while we have grown it the past few years, it has not had a lot of success on our retail benches (nobody knows what it is). This is going to change. The breeders have been working on this hardy plant and the new colours, mainly in the pink spectrums, will really interest you if you have a hot spot in your garden. Oh yes, the plant is almost indestructible. It's pest free, does not need pruning or flower picking and will bloom until a frost knocks it down. The tough part is that unless you are an accomplished seed starter, you will have to buy this plant from a greenhouse; its a monster to germinate and get growing, having very specific requirements for germination. Try it on your own, but do not invest the farm in seed stock until you have it mastered. Next month, I'll focus on a few of the newer plants that you might want to try. In the meantime, I hope that all Lantern readers have a very Merry Christmas and that the very real joy of the season is yours. Andrea and I, along with our family hope that the simple gifts of life will be yours in 1991.

## Petals Pantry



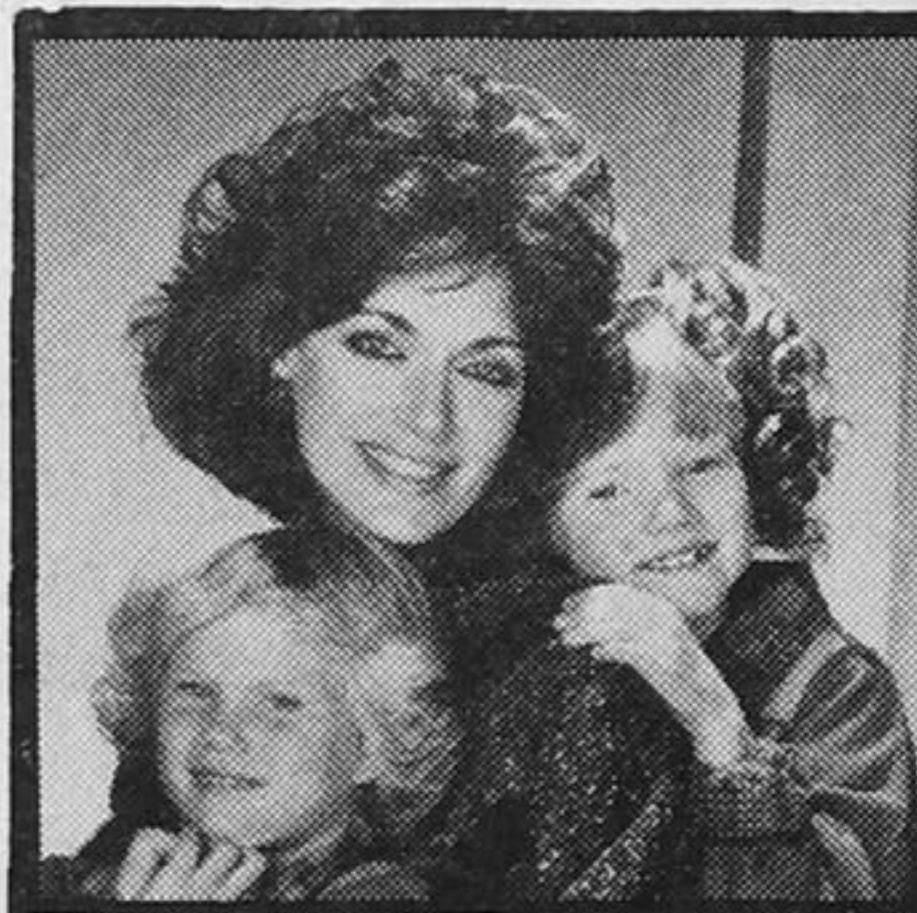
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