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Mistletoe The Plant – Is It Good Or Bad?

By Robert Mosse

Is mistletoe the plant good for anything other than "getting caught" under? Visions of Christmas

cheer, festivities, and kisses pop into our heads when we think of mistletoe. The tradition of kissing under the mistletoe started long ago... where a berry would be taken off the sprig every time a kiss was exchanged. But there's much more to this green, leathery sprig than you might think.

Mistletoe is the name for a group of parasitic plants. They have no true roots, and attach themselves to trees for survival. Mistletoe lives off the host tree – without it, the plant would die.

Mistletoe the plant is quite the vagabond. It is spread around by birds that eat the mistletoe's red and white berries. A sticky pulp within each berry contains the mistletoe seed. The pulp oozes from the bird's beak and fastens to a tree's branches. Seeds can also be transported from one tree branch to another by the bird's droppings.

Mistletoe – The Notorious Plant

The mistletoe plant has had an interesting bout with its reputation, both good and bad. Many people, usually those having trees that are burdened by this plant, think of mistletoe as a destructive nuisance. The plants draw water and minerals from the trees, and during a drought this can be quite devastating. Mistletoe infestation often results in deformities of the tree's branches.

Pruning the infested tree is helpful, if the amount of mistletoe is small. For an overwhelming infestation, the only real remedy is to remove the tree. At the very least, cutting out the parasite itself will reduce its spread somewhat. The mistletoe will eventually grow back. Unfortunately, the chemicals that will destroy mistletoe are harmful to the host trees.

Is mistletoe a hazard? Yes, in varying degrees. Contact with the berries can cause a rash very much like poison ivy to people who are sensitive to it. Many mistletoe plants are also poisonous to small children and pets. Typically, ingestion of enough mistletoe causes stomach and intestinal irritation with diarrhea. Slow pulse and lowered blood pressure can also occur.

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Mistletoe – The Honorable Plant

Historically speaking, mistletoe has enjoyed a high reputation of bringing about good luck and prosperity. The ancient Europeans considered mistletoe to be a sacred plant. Scandinavian countries believed that if armies were at war where mistletoe was overhead, the fighting would stop. In Greece, it was believed mistletoe would bring fertility and abundant life to newlyweds. The Druids used the plant for sacrifice, and Celts thought mistletoe had great healing powers.

Mistletoe has been a long-time favorite of herbalists and natural healers in Asia and Europe. The extract from mistletoe the plant (not its berries) has been used for treating conditions such as cancer, respiratory ailments, circulatory problems and epilepsy. The parts of the mistletoe plant used for therapy are the leaves and developing twigs.

According to the National Cancer Institute, laboratory and animal studies have been conducted with

mistletoe. The findings suggest that mistletoe may enhance the immune system. However, few studies on humans have been done.

Although there is a good deal of information about mistletoe's ability to affect the immune system, there is no scientific evidence yet stating that this heightened immunity leads to increased destruction of cancer cells.

All in all, the mistletoe plant has emerged victorious from such a diverse background. Today, the Christmas tradition of the mistletoe plant has sparked its market value and popularity. Just remember to keep it out of reach of pets and little ones... and when the mistletoe berries run out, so do the kisses.

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Robert Mosse is a gardening and lawn care specialist and author of the "Easy" Lawn and Gardening Book Series. Visit Robert at

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the free Guide for 101 Gardening Tips.

How To Find Christmas Decorations For Your Home

By Adam Peters

Christmas is a wonderful time for everyone, and decorating your house can enhance that joy, this can be something small like a table display or you could decorate your whole house inside and out. Christmas decorations have been around a lot longer than Christmas it's self, as pagans were doing it

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for over two centuries.

The Christmas Table.

You can do a lot to your dinner table without spending too much money, get into the woods and find some fir cones, some gold spray paint along with some fake snow and you have a centre piece to grace any table on the special day and for a long time after. Tinsel with holly leaves and mistletoe makes a natural and cheap adornment and is a very old Celtic symbol of fertility.

A Christmas Tree.

Christmas trees have been brought into our houses for years, probably it was the Germans who started it, but now everyone has a tree for Christmas. A real tree is beautiful, but could make a mess of needles on your floor if it hasn't been treated with chemicals. If you want a real tree get one with roots, you can keep it alive and then re-plant it in the new year and it shouldn't make a mess, or get a fake tree, these can look realistic but you will not fool anyone, they are not real but will look beautiful every year when you pull it out of the cupboard.

Originally candles were used to light Christmas trees, this proved very dangerous, so now electric lights that flash and play Christmas carols are a safer option. Some people go over the top with tree decorations, keep it simple, tinsel, balls, stars and of course a fairy or an angel on the top to finish it all off.

Inside The House.

Coloured paper, silver tinsel and fake snow around the house will bring a festive feel to your home, snow on the windows, holly above the doors and you must have mistletoe to get those Christmas kisses from your guests. House decorations, like your tree should be subtle, Christmas is a happy time of the year and a time to relax with the family in a calm joyous atmosphere.

Outside The House.

A wreath of holly on the door was all that people used to show at Christmas, now people have father Christmases climbing up their roofs, light shows and carols played from loudspeakers. Fake snow on all the windows is nice, but covering your house in it is probably going too far. So do what pleases you (and your neighbours), but have a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Adam Peters writes regularly for

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reviews very often on decorating and design topics. You can also reach interesting articles on easter

and christmas decorations at his site (

<http://www.home-decorating-reviews.com/christmas/christmas-decoration.html>

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