

Healthy Georgia Connections

Issue No. 17

NEWS YOU CAN USE FROM **UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA** COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

EXTENSION FEATURE

Giving thanks can keep marriages going

Aaron Hale, executive editor, University of Georgia

For resilient marriages, thanks is best given year-round, not just at the holidays. That's according to University of Georgia researchers at the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

"We found that feeling appreciated and believing that your spouse values you directly influences how you feel about your marriage, how committed you are to it, and your belief that it will last," said study co-author Ted Futris, a human development and family science professor and UGA Cooperative Extension family life specialist.

The 2015 study found that feelings of gratitude boosted marital satisfaction, commitment and stability, especially during difficult times. In the study, couples who had mismatched and counterproductive styles of conflict — the kind where one spouse brings up every harm done, while the other goes quiet and withdraws — could withstand that dysfunction with something called "perceived gratitude."

"As long as they felt appreciated by their spouse, they weren't thinking about divorce as much," said lead author Allen Barton, who earned his doctoral degree in human development and family sciences at UGA in 2013 and is now an assistant professor at the University of Illinois. "It goes to show the power of 'thank you.'"

Here's how implementing gratitude into marriage could work:



Figure out what to be grateful for

If you're thinking more about what you wish your spouse had done rather than appreciating what they actually do, it might be because you're not seeing what your spouse is putting into — or at least is trying to put into — the relationship. After all, people tend to be more aware of the work they put in than what others are doing.

"Start with the recognition that we're all prone to be a little more self-centered than we might realize," Barton said. "You have to be aware of it. We're not as fair and objective as we'd like to think."

So, acknowledge that your spouse might have been making an effort in ways you don't see.

continued on page 5



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION



FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES**Resolve to improve the air in your home**

Pamela R. Turner, professor and Extension housing specialist, College of Family and Consumer Sciences

As people spend more time inside their homes, concerns about indoor air quality are magnified. The air inside homes is actually more polluted than the outside air and can negatively impact you, but a few simple safety checks and changes could make a big impact on your health.

Health impacts depend on the types of air pollutants, how often you breathe them and your current overall health. People at the greatest risk are the elderly, the very young and those with preexisting conditions such as asthma, allergies or cancer.

The good news is that you can control most of the contaminants inside your home. The first step is to be aware of what might be in your indoor air and how it could harm your health.

The air inside your home is filled with many particulates. Some are homegrown and others are brought inside. Contaminants that impact the air inside your home include mold, dust mites, pollen, pet dander, tobacco smoke, carbon monoxide, radon and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

There are three primary ways you can improve the air in your home.

Reduce what you bring indoors

Avoid using air fresheners, cleaning products and personal care items with a strong smell. The VOCs found in fragrances contain large numbers of chemicals that may be carcinogenic or result in migraines or respiratory problems for some people.

If you do purchase these items, store them in the garage and away from the door leading into your home. Alternatively, choose unscented products or make natural air fresheners.

Ventilate your home

Improving the flow of air in your home helps reduce problems caused by contaminants like mold, tobacco smoke, carbon monoxide, radon and VOCs. Ventilation helps dilute the concentrations in the air, but it doesn't solve problems like radon or carbon monoxide. Both of these gases are invisible and odorless, so it's important to test or install a detector. You can purchase a radon test kit from UGA Extension at radon.uga.edu.

To protect your family from carbon monoxide poisoning, have a professional inspect your heating system and install an alarm or detector.

Select a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter for your furnace. To be classified as a HEPA filter, the U.S. Department of Energy specifies that it must filter at least 99.97% of particles sized .3 microns. Look for a pleated filter with a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Values (MERV) rating of at least 17. Be careful not to purchase a filter that is not compatible with your heating system.

Clean the air

A portable air cleaner, also known as an air purifier, can remove some pollutants from the air. It is designed to filter the air in a single room or area.

The Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM) developed the Clean Air Delivery Rate (CADR) rating system for air cleaners that rates them according to their effectiveness in removing three types of pollutants — tobacco smoke, pollen and dust. The higher the rating, the faster the system filters the air to remove the pollutants.

A general guideline is to follow the two-thirds rule: select an air cleaner with a CADR equal to at least two-thirds of the area in the room. For example, a 10- by 12-foot room with an area of 120 square feet should have a CADR tobacco smoke score of at least 80.

Since there are no federal standards for air cleaning devices, you need to do your research before making a purchase. It is not advisable to select an air cleaner that generates ozone. Although ozone can effectively remove viruses, bacteria and mold, it is a lung irritant.

Air cleaners alone will not protect you and your family from the virus that causes COVID-19. However, when used along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's best practices, a portable air cleaner can be helpful in reducing the potential for airborne transmission of the virus.

For more information on air cleaners and air filters, visit EPA.gov or see UGA Extension publication "[Be Aware of Your Indoor Air](#)."

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES**How to keep your holiday plants healthy year-round**

Laura C. Ney, Athens-Clarke County Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, UGA Extension

As vibrant holiday plants begin to adorn the shelves of hardware stores, grocery stores and garden centers, consumers are attracted to the pinks, reds and whites atop deep green foliage to add festive pops of color in winter homes. The appearance of plants like poinsettias and Christmas cacti usher in the holiday season and we love to fill our halls and entryways with their holiday cheer. But how about after the holidays?

Most of us accept the demise of these seasonal decorations once the new year begins. But, do we have to? Here are some simple guidelines to keep your poinsettias and Christmas cacti healthy and ready to shine again next year.

Maintain vigor

The best way to understand how to care for these plants is knowing where they come from and understanding the conditions in which they evolved. Both poinsettias and Christmas cacti have their origins in the tropical mountains of Central and South America. Despite the common name of Christmas “cactus,” neither poinsettias nor Christmas cacti are adapted to arid conditions. It is OK, even preferable, to let soils dry out somewhat before watering, but they cannot withstand long periods of dry soil. Sticking your finger an inch or two into the soil or picking up your pots to see if they are heavy or light are good, easy ways of deciding if your plants need to be watered. Each time you water, make sure to water deeply, soaking all of the soil, but making sure the excess water can run freely away from the pot, so that the soil does not stay saturated.

While poinsettias will happily take a spot by a window that gets full sun, the Christmas cactus in its natural habitat lives on the trunks and branches of other plants and prefers indirect or dappled light. This might mean placing your Christmas cactus just to the side of a window or toward the middle of a room instead of right on the window sill.

Both plants will do well in average home temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. However, avoid drastic changes in temperature, such as from a draft, a nearby door or being in the path of air from air conditioning and heating vents.

Maintain aesthetics

Poinsettias naturally grow as a somewhat tall and leggy shrub. In order to maintain an attractive, bushy form, cut back your poinsettia a few times during the year. In the early spring, cut your poinsettia back until about 6 inches of stem remains. Once new growth begins, you can begin fertilizing with a complete fertilizer, following the directions on the fertilizer label. Around July, remove the top of the plants, leaving four to five leaves on each stem. If the plant becomes leggy in early fall, this step can be repeated.



In order to signal color and bud production, both plants need “short day” conditions, which means 12 to 14 hours of total darkness each night. Poinsettias may require these “short days” for up to 10 weeks. This means that, beginning 10 weeks before you wish to see color, the plants will need at least 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness each night. Be aware that even a small amount of light can interrupt this process. Christmas cacti do not require as many short days, but they should be grown in cooler nighttime temperatures of about 50 to 60 F to initiate bud formation. Once color begins to form on poinsettias, or buds begin to form on Christmas cacti, the signaling is complete and you can leave the plants to grow in normal conditions.

Following these basic guidelines can allow you to enjoy your plants again next holiday season.

For more information, see UGA Extension [Circular 951](#), “Care of Holiday and Gift Plants.”

4-H YOUTH**Cutler recipient of annual 4-H Green Jacket Award, other patrons honored**

Sean Montgomery, *public relations coordinator, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences*

Gale Cutler, a senior public relations coordinator at the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (EMC), has been named the 2020 recipient of the prestigious Georgia 4-H Green Jacket Award. In addition to Cutler's role at Georgia EMC, she is an integral member of the Georgia 4-H Advisory Committee.

Awarded each year since 2008, the Green Jacket Award, presented by the Georgia 4-H Program, recognizes an outstanding public servant who continuously exhibits tremendous support and commitment to the program and its initiatives.

"The success of the Georgia 4-H program is made possible by excellent Extension staff, volunteers and donors who support our efforts to help 4-H members achieve their goals and dreams," said Georgia 4-H Leader Arch Smith. "The Stars Across Georgia program recognizes outstanding 4-H adults who exemplify the best of Georgia 4-H."

This year's Stars Across Georgia awards ceremony was held virtually, honoring the statewide recipients of the William H. Booth Award, the Friend of Georgia 4-H Award and the Ryles Rising Star Award, in addition to the coveted green blazer presentation.

Cheryl Poppell of Toombs County was awarded the Georgia EMC-sponsored William H. Booth Award, recognizing her contributions as a University of Georgia Cooperative Extension agent. Poppell has worked as a 4-H Extension agent for 21 years, impacting the lives of hundreds of youth and adults by expressing the importance of agriculture and specialized program development.

"Georgia 4-H provides a powerful positive influence on young people's lives through 4-H Extension agents like Cheryl Poppell," said Cutler. "By making a commitment to youth as they contribute their time, creativity and caring dedication, they make a difference across their communities and our state."

George Lee, a retired Crisp County Extension agent, picked up the Friend of Georgia 4-H Award presented by the Georgia Association of Extension 4-H Agents. Awarded to an individual who exemplifies dedication and longstanding commitment to 4-H, Lee received the honor for his more than 60 years of support and involvement with the organization.

"A personal passion exists for 4-H program accomplishments in young people as they attain leadership and education skills," said Lee. "This passion was born in me from early childhood experiences in 4-H and was strengthened in working with so many young members, parents and community leaders. I'm glad my family chose 4-H as an educational life tool and I'm glad to be a friend of Georgia 4-H."

Bulloch County's Susannah Lanier was honored with the Ryles Rising Star Award, named after former Georgia 4-H Leader Dr. Roger C. "Bo" Ryles to commemorate outstanding success and membership within the first five years of employment at either a county program, 4-H center or state office. Lanier actively leads youth development programs for more than 1,800 youth in 90 different clubs. In her three years as a 4-H agent, she has become an innovative voice in numerous areas, including the transition to virtual programming.

"In a short period of time, Susannah has distinguished herself as a very bright star in 4-H," said Lee Anna Deal, Southeast District 4-H program development coordinator. "She has grown the number and use of volunteers and she has expanded offerings in competitive events, increased leadership and service opportunities, and continues to find ways to meet the needs of her community. Above all, she has shown great character during uncertain times, quickly coming to the aid of many who were struggling to adapt to a new virtual world."

Each of the award candidates is nominated by members of their community and 4-H representatives throughout the state.

"One of the highlights of our 4-H year is recognizing the outstanding community and Extension leaders who make our organization such an impactful success," said Johnathon Barrett, executive director of the Georgia 4-H Foundation. "My sincere congratulations are extended to all of the recipients of this year's Green Jacket, William H. Booth, Friend of Georgia 4-H and Ryles Rising Star awards. It is an outstanding group of people."

For more information on the awards and the Georgia 4-H program, visit georgia4h.org.

Giving Thanks, *continued from page 1*

How to start the conversation

If you're not sure whether your spouse feels appreciated, you could try asking.

"Start by telling them the reason," Barton said. "I want you to feel valued in this relationship' and then simply ask 'Is there any area in our relationship where you feel unappreciated?'"

If so, ask how you can change that.

But be careful of when you're asking the question. It's best to avoid this conversation when you're putting your kids to bed or in a period of conflict.

Many ways to say thank you

When it comes to expressing gratitude, you could just say thank you. But there are other options that might be more meaningful to your spouse — gifts, cards, or even just a midday text message.

Of course, expressing gratitude is only one component of a healthy marriage. And what is a problem for one marriage may never come up in another. The real measure of resilient marriages, Futris said, is how couples interact day after day.

"All couples have disagreements and argue. And, when couples are stressed, they are likely to have more arguments," he said. "What distinguishes the marriages that last from those that don't is not how often they argue, but how they argue and how they treat each other on a daily basis."

EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS

Household Water Quality series

The quality of your water supply can have both an immediate and a prolonged effect on the health of your household. This publication series contains basic information about home water quality and treatment: [L.uga.edu/hwq](http://uga.edu/hwq).

LOOKING ^{TO BUY} LOCAL?
Let Us Connect You!



AG PRODUCTS CONNECTION




In collaboration with Georgia Grown and other industry partners, UGA Extension is using its network of county offices to connect agricultural producers with consumers looking for fresh, Georgia-grown products. Visit L.uga.edu/AG for more.



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION



***Our purpose:** We translate the science of everyday living for farmers, families and communities to foster a healthy and prosperous Georgia.*

    @UGAExtension extension.uga.edu

An Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, Veteran, Disability Institution. OCCS FY20