

Murtagh: The World of Aragon (Inheritance Cycle)
 By Christopher Paolini (Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers) \$30
 The world is no longer safe for the Dragon Rider Murtagh and his dragon, Thorn. An evil king has been toppled, and they are left to face the consequences of the reluctant role they played in his reign of terror. Now they are hated and alone, ex-

iled to the outskirts of society.
 So begins an epic journey into lands both familiar and untraveled, where Murtagh and Thorn must use every weapon in their arsenal, from brains to brawn, to find and outwit a mysterious witch. In this gripping novel starring one of the most popular characters from Christopher Paolini's blockbuster Inheritance Cycle, a Dragon Rider must discover what he stands for in a world

that has abandoned him. Murtagh is the perfect book to enter the World of Aragon for the first time or to joyfully return.
 Merry Christmas! And until next year, happy reading.
 The staff at Covered Treasures can be reached at books@ocn.me.

December Library Events

Special program and schedule changes

By Harriet Halbig
 This December, the Monument Library is offering a special program for teens, adults, and seniors. As an affordable gift or a personal treat, come to the library and make a peppermint mocha-scented candle in your own mug or one provided by the library. The program will be offered from 11 to 12:30 on Friday, Dec. 8. Registration is required online at ppld.org (look under pro-

grams by location) or by calling 719-488-2370.
 Toddler Time, Storytime, and Stay and Play are suspended for December.
 The Tweens Dungeons and Dragons Club for ages 9 to 12 will meet on Friday, Jan. 5 from 4 to 5:30. No experience is required, and new members are always welcome. Registration is required online at ppld.org (look under programs by location) or by calling 719-488-2370.

Come to the library for a peaceful escape from the holiday bustle. Enjoy some time by our wall of windows with a favorite book or magazine.
 Please note that all library facilities will be closed on Dec. 24 and 25 and Jan. 1.
 Happy holidays from the library!
 Harriet Halbig can be reached at harriethalbig@ocn.me.

High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

Getting holiday cactuses to bloom

By Janet Sellers
 Holiday cactuses can live up to 50 years. They originally came from the Brazilian rainforests. I found some surprises about this non-toxic plant that's safe for dogs and cats. Christmas cactus, Thanksgiving cactus, and Easter cactus are common names for this succulent plant.

The University of Georgia reports on its botanical extension website that the original Christmas cactus was developed by French botanist Charles Lemaire and named after French horticulture collector Frédéric Schlumberger. Schlumbergera is now the correct botanical name, but they are frequently called Zygocactus.

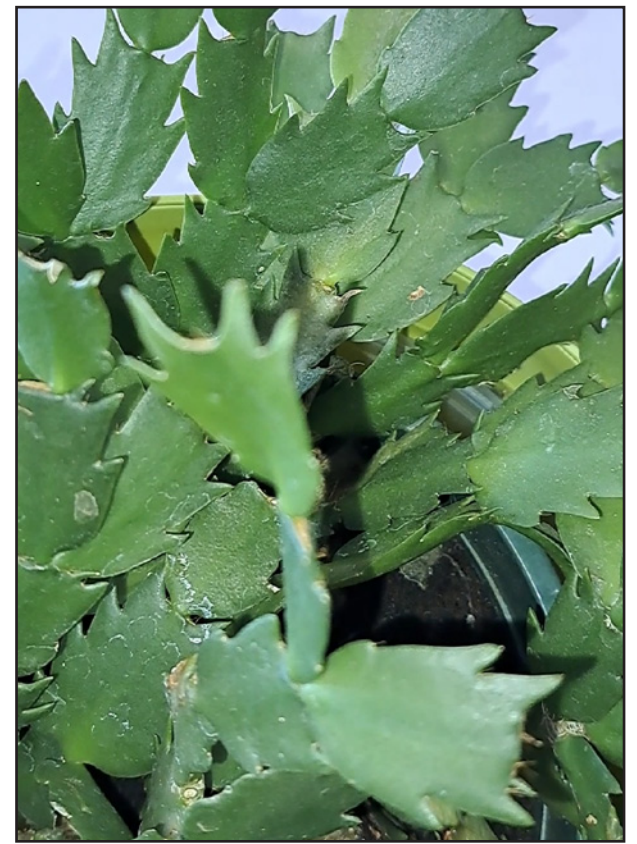
These plants stay in bloom for three to six weeks, each blossom lasting about a week. They have adapted to be pollinated by hummingbirds in the Brazilian rainforest. The 20-30 flower "tepals" fuse to form a floral tube for the hummingbirds to pollinate. The Christmas cactus flowers have pink pollen and later, a fleshy fruit.

I enjoy my Christmas cactus plants but was disappointed when they didn't form buds this year. Alas, I think my plants will probably bloom for Valentine's Day given the advice I found. About a couple of months before the desired bloom time, a very consistent 50 to 60-degree indoor temperature, 12 to 14 hours of darkness every 24 hours, is needed. As short-day plants they need cool temperatures (but not cold) to

trigger flowering.
 The plants are so sensitive that even a street light or a night light will affect them. We can simply cover them every night and then take the covering off the next morning, and do this for six weeks (and get them to bloom again in the year with this trick months after their first blooming). Increased darkness compensates for temperatures above 65 degrees. After buds appear it could take 6-8 weeks to actually bloom (especially for the second time) with no fertilization during flowering.

Christmas cactuses will drop flower buds with sudden changes in temperature, overwatering and low humidity, but go limp if they're over-watered. Water every two weeks when soil is dry an inch down. They like being rootbound, needing repotting every couple of years. Prune them to a nice shape and keep the green stem segments to root and make new plants.

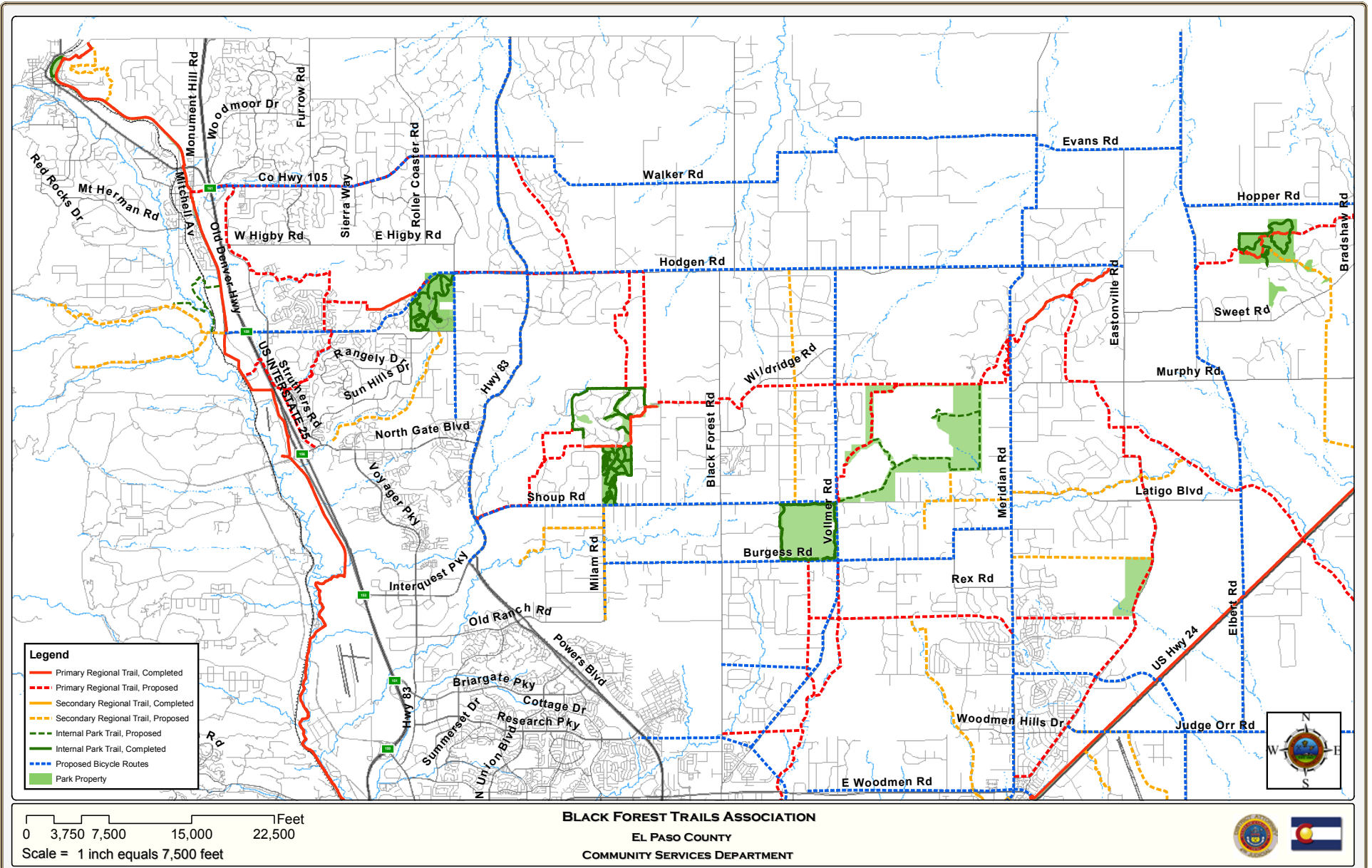
Janet Sellers is an avid "lazy gardener" letting Mother Nature lead the way for natural growing wisdom. Reach her at JanetSellers@OCN.me.



Above: These "cactuses" are succulents identified by differences in greenery. Thanksgiving cactuses have pointy edges and Easter cactuses have rounded edges. Christmas cactuses can have both—it is a combination of the others, blooming in December in the Northern Hemisphere's long nights and short days. This is a photo of a "Thanksgiving" cactus bought near Christmastime last year. Their blooms are triggered by long, cool nights, and they can bloom any time of year with proper conditions. Photo by Janet Sellers.

On the Trail (in memory of Tim Watkins)

Black Forest Trails Association



Above: Several parks in the El Paso County Parks and Trails system are connected through efforts of the Black Forest Trails Association. Map provided by Cheryl Pixley. This trails map can be downloaded at www.ocn.me/pdf/v23n12bftamap0815.pdf.

By Marlene Brown
 The Black Forest Trails Association (BFTA), a local nonprofit organization, originally became a business entity to create a connection with local residents and the El Paso County Parks

staff. BFTA was created in 1995. It worked with the community and board members who had a real interest in the non-motorized multi-use recreational trail system in the Black Forest area, neighborhoods, and the El Paso County Regional

Trails System.
 So many things have changed in the last 30 years. BFTA had helped implement trails and roads in Black Forest and then the fire came. Ten years ago, many trees and structures burned.