

# Nature Notes

A digital journal documenting the search for truth, beauty and goodness in God's lovely creation throughout the diocese of Fort Worth.

December 5, 2019

## I wonder. . .

Why are poinsettias so integral to American Christmas celebrations?

The poinsettia originally hails from Mexico, and was important to the Aztec people for medicinal reasons and as a dye for fabrics.

According to tradition, Franciscan monks used poinsettias for their nativity processions. The flower became known as "Flores de Noche Buena" or "flowers of the Holy Night" from a popular legend. The story tells of a young girl who was going to church to see the nativity on Christmas Eve. She was sad because she had no gift to offer the Christ Child. Her cousin told her that Jesus sees the love in the gift more than the gift itself, so she collected a bouquet of weeds along the roadside for the Baby Jesus. When she laid the flowers at the foot of the manger in the church, they transformed into beautiful poinsettias.

They earned their common name, poinsettia, from the first US Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Robert Poinsett. He brought the flower back to his home in South Carolina. He cultivated the plant and shared it. Eventually, a friend began selling the plant commercially, and advertised by giving poinsettias to popular television programs for their Christmas decorations.

December 12 is National Poinsettia day. Poinsettias are the best-selling potted plant in the United States.



Contrary to urban legend, poinsettias are not toxic to people or pets. Eating the leaves could cause an upset stomach, and the latex can cause skin irritation, but they won't kill you.

<https://www.ambius.com/blog/the-long-strange-tale-of-the-poinsettia-in-christmas-lore/>

<https://www.whychristmas.com/customs/poinsettia.shtml>

## I notice. . .

We go through a LOT of paper towels in the restrooms here at Nolan. Using paper towels for



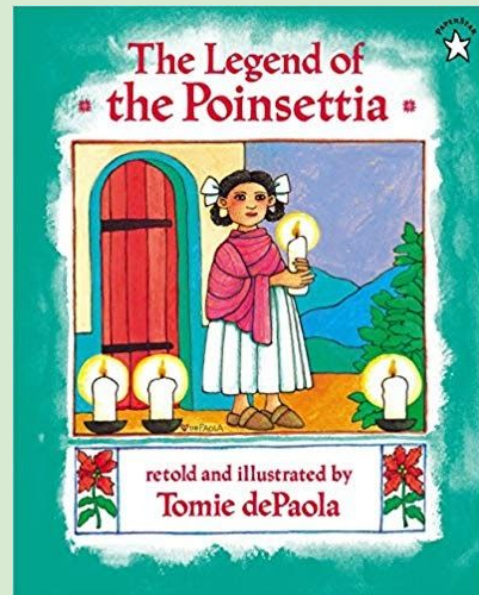
drying hands or mopping spills makes them unrecyclable. In Japan, people carry small *tengui*, or personal hand towels to use instead of disposable towels. They can be clipped to a backpack or set out to dry on a table. How much difference would switching to reusable hand towels make? According to one source, each person in the US uses  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a tree each year in paper towels. That translates to 23 pounds of paper in the landfill, and 250 gallons of water to produce the towels.

So, what can you use for a personal hand towel? Consider old dish towels, cut up old t-shirts (added bonus: they don't fray) or purchasing personal towels from a reliable source online.

<http://www.wehatetowaste.com/japanese-style/>  
<https://ecofamilylife.com/cleaning/paper-towel-usage-facts-amazing-things-you-need-to-know/>

## Good Reads

Tomie dePaola stories are classic, and he has several about plant legends. This one would be an excellent addition to your family Christmas traditions, or a wonderful gift.



*Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain.*

Henry David Thoreau, "Excursions"

## Where to find Mrs. Breclaw next week

Mon- 11-2:30

Tues-8:30-2:30

Wed- out of office

Thu- 8:30-4

Fri- 8:30-1 (Nolan) 1:45-4 (Immaculate Conception School in Denton)

## Nolan Outdoor Learning Headquarters

In the office immediately to the left of the teacher boxes in room D22.

Please come by anytime! Let's chat about how we can work outdoor learning into your lesson plans!

[ebreclaw@nchstx.org](mailto:ebreclaw@nchstx.org)