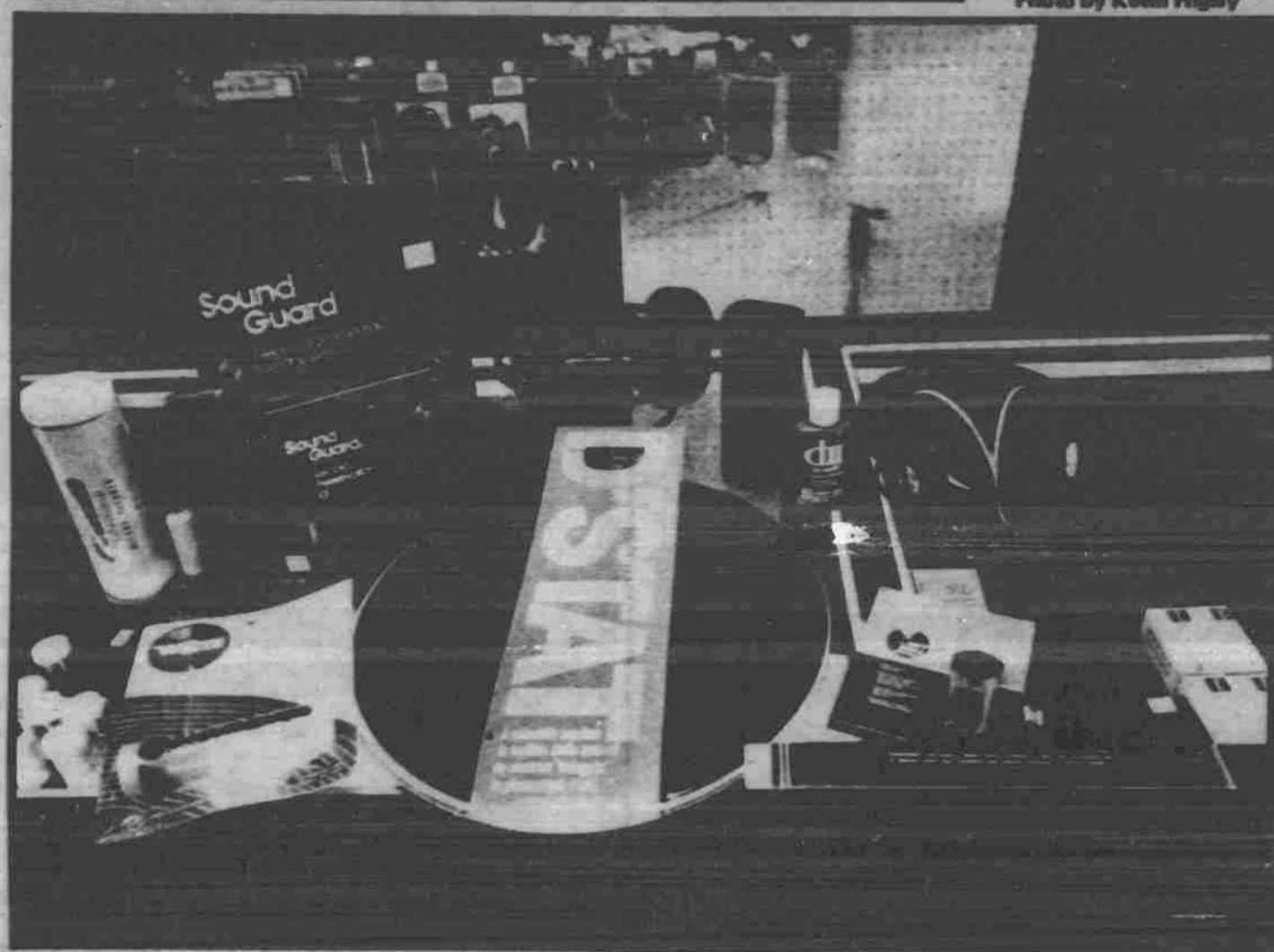


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Photo by Kevin Higley



Yuletide season is the only 'holly-day'

By Larry Lutz

Poinsettias, mistletoe and boughs of holly are plants that deck the halls exclusively at Christmas time.

Local plant and nursery experts said those are unique because they only generate public interest during the Christmas season.

Mistletoe is perhaps the best example of an exclusively Christmas plant. It is a shrub, native to Europe, which grows as a parasite on their trees. It is found most frequently on apple, thorn, maple and poplar trees, but seldom on oak trees.

Magical powers

The Celts and southern Europeans believed mistletoe had magical powers, and from this comes our tradition of kissing under the mistletoe at Christmas time.

Nursery owners said most of the mistletoe sold in this country is really American or false mistletoe and not the authentic European variety. It is grown from New Jersey to Indiana and southward from Florida to Texas.

Another plant purchased almost exclusively at Christmas time is the poinsettia, a shrub, with velvety red leaves and small yellow flowers. It is a native of the damp, tropical climates in Central America and Mexico.

It was first cultivated by Joel Poinsett of Charleston, S.C., who later had it distributed commercially.

Shipped in

It grows from 3- to 6- feet tall and can be grown outside in Bermuda and southern California. However, most poinsettias purchased locally are grown as hybrids in green houses and shipped in before Christmas.

Another perennial Christmas favorite is the plant popularly known as the Christmas Cactus. The plant has smooth, oblong leaves. When cared for properly, its annual blooming of bright pinkish-red flowers will occur during the Christmas season.

Nurserymen said the plant needs to establish a cycle and, once it has, it will bloom around Christmastime every year. The plant will flourish inside during the winter, but can be set outside during Lincoln's summer months.

Toxic decorations

Another traditional favorite is holly, a plant used for decoration at Christmas since the Middle Ages. Small holly plants can be purchased locally, but to get the small red berries, which characterize the holly plant, a male and female plant are needed.

By setting the two plants near each other, nurserymen said germination is possible, resulting in bright red berries.

Like mistletoe berries and poinsettia leaves, holly berries can be toxic to humans.



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