



Mistletoe is a festive holiday decoration

While known as Oklahoma's official floral emblem, mistletoe is most commonly recognized as a holiday decoration – under which you might find mommy kissing Santa.

Mistletoe is the oldest of Oklahoma's symbols. It was adopted as the territorial flower 1893 – 14 years before statehood. Today it is known as Oklahoma's floral emblem. There are over 1,000 different species found throughout the world.

Although considered a parasitic plant, mistletoe has a long-standing tradition as a popular decoration during the holiday season. It grows on trees throughout Oklahoma, particularly in the southern regions of the state. The dark green leaves and white berries show up brightly in the winter in deciduous trees that have shed their own leaves.

As a parasitic plant, it grows on the branches or trunk of a tree and actually sends out roots that penetrate into the tree and take up nutrients and water, which slowly weaken the tree. A mature tree can withstand a small amount of mistletoe with no problem, but if it spreads, the tree will eventually die, one limb at a time. The tree will literally have the life sucked out of it. Thankfully, mistletoe won't take out an entire forest like some diseases can – just a tree here and there.

However, mistletoe also is capable of growing on its own. Like other plants, it can produce its own food by photosynthesis, but is more commonly found growing as a parasitic plant.

The Celtic Druids valued mistletoe for its healing properties and were likely the first to decorate with it. The berry of the mistletoe ripens in December while the plant itself remains green, thus giving it wintertime appeal.

Why do people kiss under it? That remains a bit of a mystery, but it's believed the ancient Greeks celebrated the winter holiday of Kronia, which was the biggest and liveliest festival of the year. During the celebration, kissing may have taken place under the mistletoe.

In Scandinavia, mistletoe was considered a plant of peace, under which enemies could declare a truce, or fighting couples could kiss and make-up.

The Greeks also were known to use mistletoe as a cure for most any ailment. Historically, mistletoe has been used to treat infertility, epilepsy, hypertension, arthritis and other ailments. In more recent times, it has gained a reputation as an anti-cancer herb, but there is little conclusive evidence regarding efficacy.

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