

## Yard and Garden – 01-17-2015 – Ted Griess/Extension Horticulture Assistant

Are you sad? If so, perhaps you are dealing with a condition known as SAD— medically called, Seasonal Affective Disorder. SAD is clinically defined as a type of depression related to changes in seasons. Symptoms usually begin in late fall and may continue throughout the winter months. SAD causes its victims to feel sad and despondent. When afflicted, many individuals simply brush it off as a case of the winter blues and resolve to tough it out.

According to the Mayo Clinic, specific symptoms to winter SAD may include the following:

- Irritability
- Tiredness or low energy
- Problems getting along with people
- Hypersensitivity to rejection
- Oversleeping
- Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates
- Weight gain

Keeping one's mood and motivation steady throughout the year is most certainly healthy but not always easy to accomplish.

If SAD is the culprit negatively affecting one's mood, the Mayo Clinic suggests *Light Therapy*. During light therapy, one should sit or work near a device called a light therapy lamp or light therapy box. Light therapy lamps give off an intense, bright-light, mimicking natural outdoor daylight. Thirty minutes of exposure per day to this light is thought to alter one's circadian rhythms (biological clock). Such therapy is claimed to cause biochemical changes in the brain that help reduce or control symptoms of SAD.

I'm not a doctor (nor do I play one on TV ☺)but I do know it is normal for everyone to have days when he or she feels down; when one finds it difficult to get motivated, or perhaps when one has trouble sleeping.

Call it the winter blues or call it SAD, during the winter months is when I most frequently experience these symptoms. As not to treat these symptoms lightly, I do encourage consulting a physician if one experiences these symptoms for days, or if one discovers shaking such a slump is impossible.

Otherwise, through the years, I've discovered an easy and enjoyable way to get over my winter blues. My solution —indoor gardening. Last fall, before frost arrived, I carried a number of our prized outdoor potted plants indoors to the safety of our basement. There, in a special room, brightly illuminated by a plethora of fluorescent lights and controlled by a timer, sit my therapeutic plants. On a daily basis, I visit them. Sometimes I spend time tending to their needs such as routinely watering and grooming them. More often, I just simply stand there, also under the lights, admiring their beauty. What a joy it is for me to see these living green plants growing and blooming indoors at the same time as I glance out the window and see nothing more than a cold, bleak, snowy winter landscape. Upon leaving that room, I always feel refreshed with my spirits lifted.



Who's to say, since I've never consulted a doctor for a real diagnosis, whether I may have been experiencing symptoms of SAD or perhaps just feeling nothing more than temporary symptoms of the winter blues. One thing I know for sure —this form of treatment works for me. One might even conclude that I've unknowingly created a new version of *Light Therapy*.

As I began —are you sad? If so, knowing what I just shared with you, perhaps you might give indoor gardening a try. Such therapy might also work for you.