

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson

Flowering pot plants, including poinsettia (pictured above), carried over from the holiday season extend the holiday spirit. With a little care, they will also continue to brighten the home decor into the New Year.

Here's hoping you're among the households whose Christmas decor is graced by a beautiful holiday plant or even several perhaps. Let's take a look at several of the more popular Christmas flowers and how to care for them to prolong their beauty.

CHRISTMAS CACTUS: Christmas Cactus is an old favorite. It is common for Christmas Cactus plants to drop a few flower buds when you get them home.

These plants resent being moved at all while blooming, much less being packaged,

shipped, unwrapped, displayed, purchased and taken home. But the majority of flower buds will be retained, and their great beauty in shades of magenta, red, pink, orange, gold or white makes their purchase worth it.

When they finish

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blooming, these plants should not be discarded. The holiday cactus will reward you with blooms every year for many years if grown correctly. After all the flowers have dropped, Christmas cactuses should be given one-month rest from active growth.

Keep the plant in a well-lit window, water sparingly and stop fertilizing until new growth begins in late winter or early spring. An east or west window will provide plenty of light. They also will thrive on a porch or patio in a semi-shaded position during the summer.

POINSETTIA: Poinsettias outrank all other Christmas plants combined in popularity. They are well adapted to indoor temperatures so long as they are not allowed to sit in hot or cold drafts. Place them near a bright window and aim at keeping the soil evenly moist, but never soggy wet or overly dry.

Poinsettias used to be quite sensitive to changes from a greenhouse environment to that of a home, with leaf and flower drop being a common problem. However, with the new varieties available today you can just about plan on your poinsettias looking nice on Valentine's Day, if you care to keep them around that long.

KALANCHOE: Kalanchoes should be kept in a sunny window. This

plant flowers when the days (daylight hours) are short; consequently, they are difficult to re-flower in the home if carried over for another year.

Lights used in the home provide long days and the kalanchoes will not set flower buds under such conditions. They do make excellent foliage plants once the flowers are faded however. Just remove the flower stalks and use as a foliage plant.

CYCLAMEN: Cyclamen is also called shooting stars as its large showy flowers really do resemble falling stars. While flowers come in striking red, pink, salmon, or white colors, they fade and fall fast, so they have a short "shelf life" as flowering plants inside the home due primarily to temperature conditions.

Cyclamen needs to be kept cool. A cool home interior will benefit your cyclamen as well since it's happy with temperatures are around 66 to 68 degrees in daytime and about 65 degrees at night. Keeping such temperatures this holiday season will be harder on the pocketbook given 80-degree temperatures over the Christmas weekend and air conditioners getting a winter workout.

CHRISTMAS PEPPER: Christmas Pepper is becoming more popular each year as a gift plant. The colorful red, yellow, orange, and green peppers make it a distinc-

Prolong the Beauty of Christmas Plants

tive plant to give or receive. Ornamental pepper plants will thrive inside the home for several weeks, and will make an interesting potted or container plant for the patio or porch. However, do not allow the plant to be subjected to temperatures below 35 degrees.

MOTH ORCHID: Moth Orchid, also known as the phalaenopsis orchid, is the most commonly available orchid. Place these orchid plants in bright, indirect light, away from direct sun and drafts. Orchids prefer warm rooms with high humidity. Water sparingly and avoid pooling water where the leaves attach to the crown of the plant. Flowers are produced on a long slender stalk, and will open one at a time.

The blossoms will last several weeks before dropping off the stem. Allow the stalk to yellow and wither before cutting it off at the plant's base. Fertilize the orchid once a month with a dilute fertilizer, such as a 10-10-10 or orchid mixture. When a new stem and flower buds appear, stop fertilizing and enjoy the delicate blossoms again.

Flowering pot plants carried over from the holiday season extend the holiday spirit. With a little care, they will also continue to brighten any home decor into the New Year.

