

Prolong the Beauty of Christmas Plants

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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Dr. William M. Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

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PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson

Cyclamen are cool-season, tuberous-root plants that can star in a dining table centerpiece for the holiday season as well as brighten a garden.

It's nearing the end of 2020 and suffice it to say that the world has changed a lot in the last ten months. That means Christmas will probably feel a little different than it has in the past but we get to make some new memories over the holiday season.

Here's hoping you're among the households whose holiday decor is graced by a beautiful holiday plant or even several perhaps. Let's take a look at several of the more pop-

ular 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 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.

CYCLAMEN: Cyclamen are ideal for those on the hunt for a festive holiday plant that works indoors and outside in the garden. The cool-season, tuberous-root plants can star in a dining table centerpiece in addition to brightening a spot in the garden. The key to success with cyclamen is to avoid overwatering. Cyclamen need to be kept cool. A cool home interior will benefit your cyclamen as well since it's happy with temperatures

that are around 66 to 68 degrees in daytime and about 65 degrees at night.

Don't toss your plants out after the holiday season is over. Plant the tubers with the top of the tuber just below the surface of the soil. Allow 6-to-10 inches between each tuber. Enjoy a profusion of blooms in garden nooks and patio pots now until late spring provided the plants are in a well-draining soil and with morning sun or bright shade.

Cyclamen thrive in temps in the 40 - to 65-degree range and will continue flowering in the garden until they fade as temperatures warm up as the spring season nears. If the temperature drops below 25 degrees, cover blooms to protect in a freeze.

Pictured with this week's column is a photo of cyclamen (taken last Monday) blooming in the Discovery Garden in Carbide Park. Give cyclamen a try in the garden—it can be worth the effort.

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.

