

Christmas plants can last beyond the holidays

Christmas cactus, poinsettia, kalanchoe and cyclamen are some of the flowering holiday plants that can be kept for enjoyment even after the holidays are gone.

These plants require bright, indirect light. Place them close to a sunny window and turn them once a week to prevent them from leaning toward the light. In rooms with poor light, place your plants under incandescent or fluorescent lamps. However, plants located too close to incandescent light may be damaged due to excessive heat.

Temperature should be kept cool for best results with most holiday plants.

The ideal temperature is lower than found in the average room. But your plants should do well if the day temperature range is 65 to 75°F and 50°F at night.

Keep the plants evenly moist. This includes the Christmas cactus since it is not a typical cactus. Avoid letting the plants become bone-dry or water-logged.

As the flowers fade on your holiday plants remove them. Removing the faded flowers improves the plant's appearance. Plus, it prevents the plant from setting seed, providing more energy for growth.

As a poinsettia begins to drop its leaves, decrease watering but don't let the roots dry excessively. In April prune the stems to about 6 inches, begin watering, fertilize and place in a well lit area but not direct sun. Forcing a poinsettia to reflower for the Christmas season can be a challenge within the average home environment.

Amaryllis is sold in flower or as a bulb which can easily be forced into flower. Each flower lasts only a few days, but since multiple flowers are produced, the plants may remain in flower for a week or more. Amaryllis is easier for the home gardener to reflower than the poinsettia. After the last flower fades, remove the bloom stalk. Leaves begin to emerge at flowering and continue to elongate after flowering when additional leaves may appear. It is essential that the leaves remain on the bulb so that it can manufacture foods needed for reflowering. It should be kept under high indoor light and watered and fertilized regularly. When the danger of frost has passed, it can be placed outdoors and grown under light shade. By late summer the leaves will begin to die and the bulb enters a resting stage. Reduce the watering, store in a cool dry place, and allow the bulb to rest two to three months. Resume watering and the plant should reflower in four to six weeks.

The amaryllis can also be planted outside in our climate and will reflower each year with proper maintenance.

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