

## CARE AND REFLOWERING TIPS FOR HOLIDAY PLANTS

With the winter holidays soon approaching, here are a few tips on care of some of the traditional decorative plants.

Amaryllis and Christmas Cactus are two plants that are worthwhile keeping year after year. Both require lots of light. Amaryllis prospers with normal household temperatures, but Christmas Cactus prefers a slightly cooler room. When these plants are in bloom, keep their soil moist, but not soggy. After blooming keep the soil of the Amaryllis the same, but let the soil of the Christmas cactus dry out between watering. After the Amaryllis has bloomed, remove its flower stalk. Starting in April, feed both plants monthly with a balanced fertilizer, and continue this feeding throughout the spring and summer.

In the fall, when the foliage of the Amaryllis dies, rest the bulb in a dark location for a month or so. Then re-pot it and begin watering again to start the new growth. Re-pot the Amaryllis bulb, wide part down, in a pot no larger than 2 inches greater than the bulb, with one-third of the bulb above the soil. In September, start to encourage the Christmas Cactus to bloom again by placing the plant in a totally dark location between 5:00 pm and 7:00 am. Recall that it prefers cool temperatures.

Like the Christmas Cactus, Poinsettias are short-day plants. The flowering response is triggered by short days with increasing periods of darkness. The major requirement to encourage flowers is 14 hours of uninterrupted darkness. Starting September 1st, they need 14 hours of darkness per day for a month, until the brackets of the Poinsettia turn color. Uninterrupted darkness is key! Even turning on a light for 60 seconds during this period will delay flowering.

Kalanchoe plants may be worth keeping for several years but generally they become gangly and are not as attractive as commercially grown plants. Give these plants bright light and normal household temperatures. Keep the soil damp, not soggy, when it is in bloom and let it dry out between watering's after blooming. Prune the plant heavily in the spring to encourage bushiness and feed it monthly with a balanced fertilizer. One may wish to root Kalanchoe cuttings rather than attempt to keep the old plant bushy and compact. Cool room temperatures in the fall will promote blooming.

The Jerusalem Cherry plant is an annual and cannot be kept over the next season. Please know that the cherry fruits of this plant are poisonous and are to be kept out of

the reach of children and pets.

In general, holiday plants last longest if they receive bright light, 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit temperatures during the day and cooler at night, but not less than 45 degrees, and keep the soil moist but not soggy.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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