

Caring for Holiday Plants

Many people purchase or receive as a gift a traditional Holiday plant. Here are a few tips on care of some of those 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's. 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 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. 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 Sept. 1st, they need 14 hours of darkness per day for a month, until the brackets of the Poinsettia turn color. It is key to have uninterrupted darkness, even turning on a light for 60 seconds during the period will delay flowering.

Kalanchoes may be worth keeping for several years but generally they become gangly and not as attractive as commercially grown plants. Give this plant bright light and normal household temperatures. Keep the soil damp, not soggy when it's 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 plant and cannot be kept over to next season, and 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, to keep your holiday plants for the longest time, give them bright light, 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit temperatures in 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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