

Prolong the Beauty of Christmas Plants

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY **Cynthia Mueller**

Flowering pot plants, including Christmas cactus (pictured above), carried over from the holiday season extend the holiday spirit. With a little care, they will also continue to brighten any home decor well into the New Year and for many years to come.

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 is an old favorite. It is common for them 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 re-

ward you with blooms every year for many years when provided properly growing conditions. 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



December 24, 2014



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News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.



window will provide plenty of light. They also will thrive on a porch or patio in a semi-shaded position during the summer.

It's a common occurrence for a single plant to be passed down from generation to generation because they're long-lived and rather easy plants to grow. My family has an heirloom Christmas cactus.

My maternal Grandmother gave my Mom a rooted cutting of a Christmas cactus 69 years ago. The exactness of the date is provided with certainty because my Mom said it was a slightly belated wedding gift from her Mom. From propagation by occasional cuttings over the decades, this Christmas cactus and its lineage have always been part of the Christmas decor at the family home as I grew up and even as I came back to the family home to visit my family over the years during the holiday season. This Christmas cactus has become a passalong plant.

One of the great pleasures of gardening is sharing information with family members, friends, and neighbors. But perhaps the best benefit of sharing with other gardeners is receiving and giving passalong plants.

Passalong plants are a Southern gardening tradition. Passalong plants are typically easy to propagate, often unavailable at a retail nursery. They are so-named because they have been "passed along" to other gardening friends and family members

over the years or even over generations. Each holds a story of where it came from and the loving hands that grew it.

I now have inherited my Mom's Christmas cactus and I'm happy as well as relieved to report that it made the 1300 mile relocation from Virginia to Texas in stride earlier this year. I expect to be amazed with a proliferation of blooms sometimes next month.

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.

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

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

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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 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. To prolong its beauty, keep the plant as cool as possible. Avoid hot drafts and over-watering.

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