

A little TLC will prolong life of Christmas plants

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

Here's hoping you're among the households whose Christmas décor was 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 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.

It's usual for a single plant to be passed down from genera-

tion to generation because they're long-lived and rather easy plants to grow. My family has a heirloom Christmas cactus.

My maternal grandmother gave my Mom a cutting of a Christmas cactus 66 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 has always been part of the Christmas décor at the family home as I grew up and even as I return home for the holiday season.

I plan on bringing back a cutting to continue the family tradition of passing this plant along.

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.



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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.

With the new varieties available today, however, you can just about a 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 reflower 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 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 also is 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.

Christmas pepper is becoming more popular each year as a gift plant. The colorful red, yellow, orange, and green peppers make it a distinctive plant to give or receive.

Ornamental pepper plants will thrive inside the home for several weeks, and will make an interesting potted or container plant for the patio or porch.

However, do not allow the plant to be subjected to temperatures below 35 degrees.

All holiday plants need natural light and perform best out of direct sun.

Once the upper surface of the soil mix in the pot feels dry to the touch, water well, and allow the upper soil surface to become slightly dry to the touch before watering again.

While it is best to water correctly at all times, it's otherwise better to underwater rather than over water.

Decorative pot wraps should be removed soon after bringing a plant home as they impede good drainage.

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 décor well into the New Year.

