



Holiday Houseplants

poinsettia / euphorbia pulcherrima

Poinsettias are one of the most beloved plants for the holiday season. Poinsettias will bloom for up to ten weeks with appropriate care. First caution is to bring them home in a timely manner – they hate cold weather! Then...

- Place blooming poinsettia in bright, indirect light. Keep plants away from hot or cold drafts. Avoid placing poinsettias on fireplace mantles if you routinely use the fireplace. Poinsettias prefer cool indoor temperatures but must be kept from cold air (doorways and windows) and hot drafts (heating vents). If leaves suddenly fall without wilting first, changing temperature is the culprit.
- Water thoroughly and then wait until the soil surface is dry before watering again. Do not let your poinsettia completely dry out or lower leaves will drop and not be replaced. If plant does dry out to the wilting point, water thoroughly until water runs out the drain holes and then water again in five minutes.
- Overwatering will also cause wilting and a loss of leaves. They don't like to sit in water so either remove decorative foil or punch holes in the bottom to allow water to drain into a saucer that can be emptied.
- Poinsettias like moist air and appreciate frequent misting. The loss of the colored bracts (flower-heads) or the leaf margins turning yellow or brown is usually due to dry air in a warm room.

christmas cactus / schlumbergera truncata (zygocactus truncates)

Although Poinsettias are the classic holiday plant, a blooming Christmas Cactus can be a lovely accent or gift for the holidays since their natural blooming period is from early November to mid-January. They come in shades of red, purple, orange, pink and cream.

- Place your Christmas Cactus in a bright location, preferably by a north or east window. Shade from direct sunlight. Ideal temperature range is 55° - 70°; do not let temperatures dip below 55°.
- During flowering and active growth, water Christmas cactus liberally when the soil begins to dry out and mist frequently. Avoid sudden changes in light, temperature or watering – consistency is important.
- Confused about getting your Christmas Cactus to rebloom? These forest cacti need both a resting period (when water and warmth are decreased) and a spell outdoors in order to produce next year's flower buds.
- When your plant has finished flowering toward the end of January, it needs a resting period. Keep at 55° and water infrequently until April 1st. Then give it two months of regular houseplant care.
- Take your Christmas cactus outside from the 1st of June until mid-September. Continue regular houseplant care and fertilize lightly. Place it in a shady spot where it is protected from slugs. Hanging from a tree branch is a good solution. Ideal temperature during this growing period is 70° - 80°.
- The pre-flowering period is from mid-September to the beginning of November. Keep your plant dryish and cool (below 90°) until the flower buds form. Night temperatures should be between 55° and 65° and eight weeks of at least thirteen hours of continuous darkness each night is required to initiate flowering.
- When flowers appear, increase water and temperature, beginning the cycle again from the top!

florist's cyclamen / cyclamen persicum

Cyclamen is a charming flowering houseplant that will bloom all winter if given the correct care. The abundant, bright or pastel-colored, swept-back flowers are accented by intricately patterned foliage. Here are a few tricks to keep your Cyclamen blooming and thriving through the long gray days after the holidays.

- Cyclamen require a cool (50° - 60°), bright area away from direct sunlight. Too much warmth and dry air are common causes for a shortened flowering period.
- Check daily to monitor soil moisture. Keep the soil evenly moist. Cyclamen are like African Violets and do not like water on their leaves or crowns. You must be very careful when you are watering, or try the immersion method: set the pot in a tub full of tepid water to just below the level of the potting soil and leave it to soak just until the surface glistens. Allow to drain before returning it to its saucer. Using a saucer filled with pebbles as a humidity tray is beneficial as is occasionally misting the air around the plant.
- Feed regularly during the flowering season.
- Plants will go dormant in summer, losing most of their leaves. Stop feeding and taper off watering to zero.
- With cooler fall temperatures, plants will begin to grow again; resume regular watering and fertilization.

ivy topiary / hedera helix

Ivy trained onto a topiary form makes a beautiful addition to decorative holiday greenery. Topiaries are easy to create – make two and give one away! There are only a few things to remember when caring for an Ivy Topiary:.

- Place your Ivy Topiary in plenty of bright light in the winter. Ideally the room should be unheated in winter or at least kept below 60° at night. Avoid direct sunlight in summer.
- Ivy suffers in hot, dry air, and thrives in humid and moist conditions. Water regularly in summer and sparingly in winter but do not allow the plant to dry out. Mist frequently. Occasionally you might want to place your plant in a tub and spray the whole plant with lukewarm water, making sure to hit the undersides of the leaves. This will add humidity to the leaves, wash off any dust, and increase moisture to the rootball. In addition it will help to prevent an infestation of spider mites, which thrive in dry environments.
- Add flowers in floral water tubes to make your Ivy Topiary more colorful. Water tubes are available at most florist shops. Poinsettia blooms are especially beautiful when scattered through a topiary – just remember to burn the cut stem with a lighter to seal it before placing it in the water tube.

creating your own ivy topiary

- Choose a topiary frame and container with drainage holes. Make sure that the pot is in scale with the size of the frame and is sturdy enough to hold the frame when it is covered with ivy.
- Use either one multi-stem or several smaller ivy plants. Ivy is a vigorous plant – make sure you loosen and spread the tangled roots before planting. Use a lighter soil such as Espoma Cactus or Regular Potting Mix.
- Carefully place the frame over the plants and sink it firmly into the soil. Some frames are meant to fit around a multi-stem plant, others will need to be surrounded by small plants.
- Working with one branch at a time, twine the ivy around the topiary form. Woodier parts without many leaves may be twined tightly to resemble a tree trunk, otherwise it's best to zig-zag throughout the form.
- Twist-ties can be used to temporarily hold the branches in place. As the ivy grows, continue to tuck in or weave the branches in and out of the frame, pruning if necessary.
- Reindeer moss or soil topper will give a finished look while helping to keep the soil moist.