



Houseplants for the Holidays

What better way to celebrate the holiday season than with a living gift to brighten a friend's window or table setting? Not only do the following plants make unusual and fun gifts, they are sure to bring cheerful color into our homes throughout the darker days of the year. The plants listed below do well inside a home if a few cultural requirements are met. These plants also flourish outside in the spring and summer and will be treasured long past the holiday season!



Christmas Cactus *Schlumbergera bridgesii*

While the poinsettia remains the most popular of the holiday plants, a healthy Christmas cactus in full bloom is a great gift idea for that special gardener. Beautiful flowers range in color from yellow, salmon, pink, lavender, fuchsia and white or combinations of those colors. These plants are easy to grow and very rewarding with only a few basic requirements.

Provide bright, indirect light. Christmas cactus will also tolerate several hours of early morning or late afternoon sun. As jungle natives, they prefer evenly moist soil when in bloom. Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer according to label instructions.

Stimulate fall blooms by keeping the cactus on the dry side and cool at night (55-60F) and out of artificial light for about a month. When buds form, increase temperature and water.

Cyclamen *Cyclamen persicum*

Cyclamen are, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful and long-lasting winter-flowering houseplants. Flowers are produced from October through March in shades of red, pink, lavender, purple and white. The standard variety of cyclamen grows 12-15" tall, and we also carry miniature types that grow 6-8" tall in a similar range of colors. Flowers on the mini cyclamen are often quite fragrant.

For best growth and optimal flowering, provide bright, indirect light. Keep the soil consistently moist, but well-drained and never soggy. Avoid getting water in the crown of the plant. Increase humidity by placing plants on a moist pebble tray. Keep the plant around 60-67F. Miniature cyclamen are more tolerant of warmer temperatures and make a great gift plant!

Norfolk Island Pine *Araucaria heterophylla*

Norfolk Island Pines are natives of Norfolk Island (between New Caledonia and Australia in the South Pacific). Although they may reach a height of 80 feet in their natural habitat, they will maintain a reasonable size when grown in a container in the home (growing 3-6" per year). The beauty and symmetry of the plant, as well as the soft texture of the foliage, could quite possibly inspire you to decorate it, and use it for your living Christmas tree!

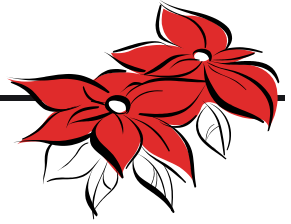
These graceful indoor trees adapt easily to various light levels in the home. Provide high humidity levels and good air circulation. Keep the soil evenly moist and feed regularly, using a general purpose fertilizer. Clean the foliage periodically, checking for spider mites and treating with insecticidal oils or Mite-X if necessary. These plants can be summered outdoors in bright indirect light.

turn over for information about poinsettias

11035 York Road • Cockeysville, MD 21030 • (410) 527-0700

www.valleyviewfarms.com

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Poinsettia *Euphorbia pulcherrima*

One of the most traditional and delightful decorations at Christmas is the poinsettia. Valley View Farms grows over 28 varieties of poinsettias in our Farm Greenhouses in Hydes, MD. While the classic color choice is a vibrant red, these days there is a wide array of other colors, including pink, white, marbled, speckled, and purple. We pride ourselves on having the healthiest and most beautiful poinsettias available.

The colorful parts of the poinsettia, the bracts, are actually modified leaves. The poinsettia flower is small, green or yellow, and situated in the middle of the bracts. Native to Central America, the plant was called *cuetlaxochitl* by the Aztecs, who used the plant for dyeing textiles, cosmetics and medicinal purposes. The poinsettia was “discovered” by Joel Roberts Poinsett, a hobbyist botanist, who was appointed as the first U. S. Ambassador to Mexico in 1825 and fell in love with this unique plant.

Care of Poinsettias

- o Place your plant in indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day. If direct sun can't be avoided, diffuse the light with a shade or sheer curtain.
- o Provide room temperatures between 68-70F. Generally speaking, if you are comfortable, so is your poinsettia. Water your plant when the soil feels dry to the touch.
- o Allow us to “sleeve” your plant to protect it while in transport.
- o Fertilize your plant AFTER it blooms with a balanced, all-purpose fertilizer.
- o Keep plants away from cold drafts or excessive heat (avoid open windows, fireplaces, appliances, ventilation ducts, etc.).
- o Don't expose plants to temperatures below 50F. Poinsettias are sensitive to cold, so don't put them outside during the winter months!
- o And, like most plants, do not overwater or allow your plant to sit in standing water. Always remove the potted plant from decorative foil before watering, and allow the water to drain completely.

Re-Blooming your Poinsettia

With proper care, dedication and a certain amount of luck, you too can re-bloom your poinsettia! As the beauty of the plant begins to “fade” by late March or early April, cut it back to about 8" in height. Continue a regular watering program, and fertilize your plant with a balanced fertilizer. By the end of May, you should see vigorous new growth. After all chance of frost has passed and night temperatures average 55F or above, place your plants outdoors in indirect sunlight. Continue regular watering and fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks. Pruning may be required in late June or early July to keep plants bushy and compact. *Do not prune after September 1.* In early June, you may transplant your poinsettia into a larger pot. Select a pot no more than 2" larger than the original pot. A soil mix with a considerable amount of organic matter, such as peat moss or leaf mold, is highly recommended.

Starting October 1, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. Accomplish this by moving the plants to a totally dark room, or by covering them overnight with a large box. During October, November and early December, poinsettias require 6-8 hours of bright sunlight daily, with night temperatures between 60-70F. Temperatures outside of this range could delay flowering. Continue the normal watering and fertilizer program. Carefully following this regime for 8 to 10 weeks should result in a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season!

The Legend of the Poinsettia

Pepita was a poor Mexican girl who had no gift to present the Christ Child on Christmas Eve. As Pepita walked sadly to the chapel with her cousin Pedro, her heart felt no joy. “I am sure, Pepita, that even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable,” said Pedro consolingly. Not knowing what else to do, Pepita knelt by the roadside and gathered a handful of weeds, fashioning them into a small bouquet. Looking at the scraggly bunch of weeds, she felt embarrassed by the humbleness of her offering. She fought back a tear as she entered the small village chapel.

She laid the bouquet at the foot of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red, and all who saw them were certain that they had witnessed a Christmas miracle right before their eyes. From that day on, the bright red flowers were known as the Flores de Noche Buena, or Flowers of the Holy Night, for they bloomed each year during the Christmas season.

According to a recent national poll, half of Americans mistakenly believe that poinsettias are toxic. In fact, no other consumer plant has been as widely tested as the poinsettia. Researchers at Ohio State University (OSU) have measured the effects of ingesting unusually high doses of all parts of the plant (including the leaves, stems and sap) and found the plant to be **non-toxic**. According to POISINDEX (R), the information resource used by the majority of U.S. poison control centers, a 50-pound child would have to eat 500 to 600 leaves to even get a bellyache!! **POINSETTIAS ARE SAFE!!**