

Care of Holiday Plants Part II  
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Last week we looked at some general care for holiday gift plants. This week let's take a look at some specifics for a few of the more popular plants. Again, Paul Thomas and Mel Garber, Extension Horticulturalist, show their expertise through their care recommendations.

Amaryllises are generally available from Christmas to Easter. These plants flower four to six weeks after bulbs are planted, with orange, red, white and pink varieties. Individual blooms may last three to four days. A flower stalk usually produces three or four large, trumpet-shaped blooms; large bulbs may produce more than one flower stalk. To reflower, place the plant in bright light (outdoors when temperatures permit). Allow the foliage to fully develop; fertilize and water throughout the summer months. In late summer or fall, as the leaves have died completely, allow the soil to dry out and place the bulb in a cool dry place for several (four to eight) weeks before resuming watering.

Holiday cactus is actually three related plant species that look like Christmas cacti. The three bloom at different times of the year and can be found in flower at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. All three require bright sunlight and moderate moisture levels. South windows are excellent places for "holiday" cactus. After the six weeks of holiday blooming, remove spent flowers and apply a houseplant fertilizer. Plants can be grown outdoors in semi-shady places. Stem pieces of three segments or more are easily propagated. Holiday cacti should bloom about the same time every year.

The colorful bracts of poinsettias may stay bright for months if you care for them properly. Bright, indirect light and frequent watering are essential. Don't allow the plants to wilt—however; watering too often can damage roots. Plants can be reflowered, although the procedure is somewhat demanding. To do it, keep the plant indoors until the danger of frost has passed, then move it outdoors. Remove the bracts when they wither and discolor. Keep the plant in high indirect light (morning sun/ afternoon shade). Water and fertilize often. Shape the plant as desired: prune it or pinch it to encourage branching. Bring the plant back indoors when night temperatures start to fall below 60 degrees. Continue to fertilize and water. Starting October 1<sup>st</sup>, give the plant 14 hours of continuous darkness daily until bract color is well developed (mid- November). This can be done by placing the plant in a closet or covering it with a cardboard box. Any light during the dark period will delay or inhibit flowering. Night temperatures at this time should be between 60 and 70 degrees. During the remaining 10 hours each day, give the plant maximum light.

For more information on these and other related questions, call me at (706) 935-4211 or come by your Catoosa County Extension Office at 43 Maple Street, Ringgold.

Seasons Greetings from your Catoosa County Extension Staff.