

## Extending Holiday Plants Beyond Holiday Season



*Photo provided by the University of Kentucky*

*Larry Williams, is an Extension Horticulture Agent with the UF-IFAS Extension in Okaloosa County . For more local gardening information, visit the UF-IFAS Extension website for Leon County at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>*

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**M**any decorative plants are used indoors during the holidays to help create a festive atmosphere. Some of the plants can last beyond the holidays if cared for properly.

Christmas cactus, poinsettia, kalanchoe, and cyclamen are some of the flowering holiday plants that can be kept for enjoyment even after the holidays are gone. All of these plants require bright, indirect light. They should be placed close to a sunny window and turned once a week to prevent them from leaning toward the light. In rooms with poor light, you can place your plants under incandescent or fluorescent lamps. However, plants located too close to incandescent light may be damaged due to excessive heat.

Temperature should be kept cool for best results with most plants associated with the holidays. The ideal temperature is lower than found in the average room. But your plants should do well if the day temperature range is 65 degrees to 75 degrees F and 50 degrees to 60 degrees F at night.

It is also important to keep the plants evenly moist. This includes the Christmas cactus since it is not a typical cactus. Avoid letting the plants become bone-dry or waterlogged due to possible damage to the root system. Most indoor plants are killed by over watering. Also remember that heating the house also dry up plants faster.

The flowers will eventually fade on your holiday plants. Once this happens you should remove them. By removing the faded flowers you improve the plant's appearance and you also will prevent the plant from setting seed, which will provide more energy for growth.

The poinsettia will begin eventually dropping its leaves. This is normal because the plant is only going into a resting stage. When the plant begins to drop its leaves, decrease watering until you are watering only enough to

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keep the root and stems from drying out excessively. In April, prune the stems to about 6 inches, begin watering, fertilize and place where it will get plenty of light but not direct sun. Forcing the poinsettia to reflower each year for the Christmas season can be a challenge within the average home environment.

Amaryllis is sold in flower or as a bulb, which can easily be forced into flower. Each flower lasts only a few days but since multiple flowers are produced, the plant may remain in flower for a week or more. Amaryllis is easier for the home gardener to reflower than the poinsettia. After the last flower fades, remove the bloom stalk. Leaves begin to emerge at flowering and continue to elongate after flowering when additional leaves may appear. It is essential that the leaves remain on the bulb so that it can manufacture foods needed for reflowering. It should be kept under high indoor light and watered and fertilized regularly. When the danger of frost has passed, it can be placed outdoors and grown under light shade. By late summer the leaves will begin to die and the bulb enters a resting stage. Reduce watering, store in a cool dry place and allow the bulb to rest 2 to 3 months. Resume watering and the plant should reflower in 4 to 6 weeks.

The amaryllis can also be planted outside in our climate and will reflower each year with proper maintenance.

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