**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**Holiday Plants after the Holidays!**

If yours is a typical household you have at least one plant that was purchased or received as a gift designed to contribute to holiday spirit and decorate the house.

Sometimes we are not sure what to do with them after the holidays. Here is a practical list along with my recommendation for post holiday care.

Living Christmas trees are selected because they can be planted in the landscape after they are decorated for use in the house. The key to living Christmas tree survival as a landscape tree is to have selected the right variety to begin with, and to get it in the landscape as quickly as possible. Deodar cedar, Aleppo pine, Italian stone pine, and rosemary have a good chance of surviving in the landscape. Plant the trees in full sun with at least 20 feet of space between them and other trees. Mulch over the root system after soaking the root ball at planting. Water through the winter and summer every time the soil surface dries. It may be every week the first summer.

Rosemary can be planted in a container or garden bed in full sun after it retires as a sheared Christmas tree. All of the living holiday trees are sheared to form their holiday shape. They will return to their more natural shape in the landscape, so don’t be disappointed.

Poinsettias will remain attractive for four month in the house if you keep them moist and out of hot or cold drafts. Use 6 to 12 ice cubes every other day and then provide a good soaking in the sink every week for maximum longevity.

Poinsettias can be planted in the landscape.

In three to five months (sooner if you let it dry out or subject it to high or low temperatures) after the Holidays, the poinsettias will decline. At that time, you will have to decide what to do with the plant. I usually toss mine in the compost pile, but you could keep it alive through the summer and attempt to produce the colorful foliage for next year. It is not as difficult as it used to be because the new selections are day neutral and it is not necessary anymore to do the complete dark routine for twelve hours every day.

When the plant declines this spring, cut the stems back to 6 to 8 inches and place it outside in the soil or in a five-gallon or larger container. A sheltered location in morning sun is ideal. Just water it through the summer and protect it from cold in the winter and your poinsettia could grow to be quite large and make a show every year. A poinsettia in the ground can be fertilized with half a cup of slow release lawn fertilizer every three months. Use a water-soluble fertilizer every three to four weeks for plants in a container. Treated in this manner, your poinsettia may even outlast the other traditional holiday item with a long life, the holiday fruitcake.

Paperwhites are among the bulbs forced for blooming during the holidays. They are easy plants to naturalize. After the blooms fade transplant the bulbs as a clump with 6 inches between each bulb, 4 to 6 inches deep in a sunny or partially shaded area. Paperwhites are very drought tolerant and are not eaten by deer. Count on them to bloom every year in January.

Amaryllis are also forced to bloom for holiday decorations. Some varieties naturalize in the landscape but it is more reliable to use them as container plants. After the bloom declines (or even before) plant the bulb in a 10 to 12 inch pot filled with good potting mix. Keep it watered but not soggy until the foliage declines sometime in early summer. Quit watering until about October 1st when irrigation is resumed. The bulb will send out a new flower and foliage. Sit the container in morning sun. Fertilize with soluble fertilizer labeled for containers every month when it is growing.

Christmas cactus will live forever in a container if you keep them watered and fertilized. They bloom again if you leave them outside and they are subjected to dark periods and cool temps in the evening. They need to go back in the house, however, when nights begin to go below the 50’s.

Phalaenopsis orchids will retain their bloom and re-bloom every year if you give them reasonable care. The right amount of light is important. We put ours on the kitchen counter below a southern exposed window. They will also prosper at an eastern facing window. Recognize that there is too much sun if the leaves show beige colored burns. Water every week and fertilize at the same time with a dilute-soluble fertilizer in the water. Phalaenopsis orchids require well drained soil and often are grown in bark chunks.

Cyclamen are shade loving plants that can be planted outside for winter color. Once the spring arrives, however, they decline quickly. If you leave them inside near a east facing window they will bloom for years.