

Gardening Q&A

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Q. We received some beautiful poinsettia for gifts this Christmas. What is the recommended way to care for them?

A. Poinsettias will look great for 4 months if you follow a few care procedures. Keep them in an environment where the temperature is above freezing. Even a few minutes in temperatures below freezing will cause defoliation. Also place them in locations where they are not subjected to cold or hot drafts. In front of heat vents is a special problem. Poinsettias require moist soil. Don't let them dry out. Applying 5 or 6 ice cubes everyday will work if you soak them in the sink every weekend. Poinsettia can tolerate placement in areas with limited light if they are alternately shifted to spots where they are near a bright window or in front of a window that receives morning sun.

Q. Our snapdragons are in full bloom. Can we cut some for bouquets in the house without hurting the plants? We want them to continue to decorate our flower bed.

A. Yes, snapdragons are one of the best plants for providing cut flowers. If you cut off the existing blooms, they will send out new flower buds. Be alert to the fact that snapdragons usually quit blooming for a 5 or 6-week period in January and February if we experience our usual cold weather. They have another bloom period March through May.

Q. When can we plant potatoes in the garden? How about onions?

A. It is a good time to plant onion transplants right now. Plant seed potatoes about February 1. You can also still plant lettuce, radish, carrot, beet, English pea, and turnip seed. Plant broccoli, chard, cabbage, kale, and collards by transplants. Prepare the soil by spreading 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of lawn fertilizer over every 100-sq. ft. of new plantings.

Q. We have Mexican lime and Meyer lemon in containers again this year. Last year they froze. What guidance can you give us for protecting them from cold?

A. I use a combination of "Plankets" and agricultural fiber or old blankets. If temperatures are forecast to be under 30 degrees cover them with the fiber and "Plankets". If the forecast is for temperatures to be under 26 degrees provide a heat source under the covering. A mechanics light or poultry heat lamp work well for the heat source.

Q. Cucumber beetles seem to be ravaging our spinach and chard. We know Bt does not work for beetles, what would work? Is it also possible that slugs and snails are active despite the cold?

A. Malathion and Sevin work for me for cucumber and other beetles. Use Bt products for caterpillars such as cabbage loopers. Slugs and snails are definitely active. They prosper in the cool, moist weather like we have been experiencing. Use slug and snail bait to control them. Follow the label instructions for all pesticides, organic or manufactured.