

Care of Poinsettia, Cyclamen, and Phalaenopsis Orchids

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The best Holiday plants for indoors include poinsettia, cyclamen, and phalaenopsis orchids. They are beautiful, easy to care for and long blooming. Many gardeners received the spectacular plants as gifts for the Holidays and have the opportunity to enjoy the bloom for many months this year and every year in the future. Another opportunity for gardeners exists because retail nurseries will have some of these great plants on sale after Christmas. Look for prices of \$15 or less for the poinsettia. Make sure the foliage is lush and full. Cyclamen will be about \$5 for a plant in a 4-inch container. Transplant the intact root ball into a larger (1 gal or more) container filled with potting mix. The phalaenopsis orchids will cost anywhere to \$25 depending on the size of the plant. Special containers and bark for the soil are available at most nurseries if you purchase a small specimen and want to plant it up.

Poinsettias will often maintain full bloom for 4 months or more. Place the plant in a spot that receives morning sun or bright light in the afternoon but is not subject to a hot blast from the sun. A hot blast from a heat register or a cold blast of freezing cold air when the door opens is also undesirable. In addition to avoiding drafts a key to poinsettia care is to keep the plant from drying out. A classic care regime is to add 6 to 8 ice cubes to the soil at mid-week and then soak the soil in the sink once per week in the weekend.

Cyclamen was used for a decorative plant indoors for many years before we found out that it did very well as a bedding plant for shade through a San Antonio winter. Cyclamen, in the right setting and with the right care will also prosper year-around in the house. We discovered that reality in our house when we were experimenting with keeping cyclamen alive all summer, so we could replant them the next winter. Set in front of east facing patio doors, watered generously and fertilized with soluble fertilizer or Osmocote, they produced large plants and bloomed continuously for several years.

Phalaenopsis orchids turned over the wide-held belief that orchids are very difficult to grow. They aren't. If you received one as a Holiday gift you can expect that beautiful stalk of blooms to remain showy for at least 4 months this year and then have it return every year thereafter. The first thing to do is to find a location for it to sit where it will receive morning sun or even southern sun if it is not direct for more than a few hours. Watering and fertilizing a phalaenopsis orchid is a bit of a different experience for us "grow it in a row gardeners"! The container is generally filled with pieces of bark and is therefore very well drained. The roots are coarse structures that collect moisture and nutrients from the air. Water the plant every week by wetting the bark and roots and let it drain into the sink. Use soluble fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro as a last treatment of liquid. Catch the nutrient rich portion of the solution that passes through the bark in a saucer to use again the next time you water.