

Cyclamen for Amazing Winter Color

Distribute 11-5-2020

Cyclamen is a great choice for winter color in the shade in San Antonio landscapes. It is now valued for an outdoor planting, but many gardeners probably remember when the main use for cyclamen was as a “get-well gift” for hospitalized friends and loved ones. They were and still are enjoyed for the foliage and colorful flowers in the hospital room during the recovery period. The “indoor” cyclamen could even be brought home to serve as an indoor plant. Placed in front of an east facing window the cyclamen would bloom indefinitely in the house.

It is hard to find a blooming plant that is more beautiful than cyclamen. The leaves are heart-shaped and colored deep green with silvery patterns etched on the surface. If it were not for the blooms the foliage would be a major attraction by itself. As it is the foliage is easy to overlook because the flower colors are so intense and the blooms so showy. The plants are blooming at the nursery now and will be blooming every day until it warms up in the spring. Choose from red, white, pink, purple, and lilac flowers all of which make a show by themselves or when colors are mixed. Most gardeners name a combination of white and red as the showiest while my favorite is a single-color planting of purple or lilac.

In most outdoor garden situations cyclamen grow to about 10 inches tall with the flowers emerging out of the leaves as buds as the winter progresses. They require shade situations and seem to do best in containers or raised beds.

The transplants are available in 4-inch or larger containers and the root ball is a dense entity that protects the roots and serves as a moisture reservoir. It sometimes means though that squirrels, cats or terriers will break the plant base at the root connection. Anything you can do to keep the aforementioned pests out of the cyclamen planting, the more likely is it that the blooms will survive and decorate the garden until it gets hot in late April.

Cyclamen are also not xeriscape plants. Your bed will work best if the dense root ball is placed in a well-drained soil and is watered anytime the soil surface dries. A moist planting bed helps keep the root ball from drying out, of course, but also from breaking at the base.

In addition to drying out, receiving too much sun, and visits from terriers, cyclamen blooms are sensitive to cold damage. Notice that I mentioned the blooms, the foliage and plant roots are not very cold sensitive, they can survive most San Antonio winters. The blooms and reserve buds, however, may be damaged by temperatures below 30 degrees. Protect them with a layer of fabric such as a product like Insulate placed over the surface of the plants when such temperatures are forecast. The one layer of material without a heat source has worked for me ever since I started growing cyclamen. In fact, most winters the blooms survived without any protection.

There are several good reasons to be conservative on cold protection. If you do allow the blooms and reserve buds to be frozen off, they will not return this year. You will have to be content with the attractive foliage! And 2) cyclamen plants are expensive. Count on investing \$5 or \$6 per plant for

cyclamen. It is not much fun to invest that much money for a season of beautiful flowers to have the flowers freeze off!