

# particularly pleasing presents at holiday time

produces large — up to dinner plate-sized — lily-shaped flowers on a tall stem. Strap shaped leaves appear after flowering. The bulbs are usually available potted and ready to grow, all you add is water. Colors range from white through pink and red.

**AZALEAS ARE** shrubby plants with glossy, dark green leaves. They bear a profusion of blossoms in a wide range of solid colors and variegations. They do best in acid soil, bright light and cool temperatures. Like amaryllis bulbs, they can be planted outdoors in the summer, then brought in before frost.

Rieger begonias flower more or less continuously indoors. Their flowers resemble those of begonias except in size — Rieger begonia blossoms are about twice as large. After some months of flowerings indoors, they may need their long stems cut back. New growth will emerge soon and flowering begin again after three or four months.

To keep cyclamen flowering, give it cool temperatures, especially at night, and plenty of bright light. Water carefully to avoid splashing water onto the foliage or into the crown of the plant — this makes the plant very susceptible to rot. After flowering, cyclamen requires a rest period.

**REDUCE** the amount and frequency of watering and place the plant where temperatures range between 40 and 50 degrees until spring. Then repot

in fresh soil with the upper half of the corm above the soil and grow outdoors in a protected spot. Bring it inside again before frost and give it bright light and cool temperatures, and it should flower again for the holidays.

But if there's no plant that suits you as well as the poinsettia, keep these tips in mind about its year-round care and how to bring it back into bloom next Christmas.

When your household gets back to normal after the holidays, place your poinsettia in a sunny window, but be sure it doesn't suffer temperatures lower than 62 degrees F by night or higher than 72 degrees during the day.

If you can't be certain it won't be too cool at night, move the plant back into the room. Use warm tap water to moisten the soil thoroughly, but only when the soil feels dry to the touch.

**WHEN THE COLOR** bracts start falling in the six weeks after receiving the plant, realize that this is the plant's natural resting period and a crucial time for caring for it. It should be moved to a cool, light place and the watering reduced until the soil is almost bone dry. The plant will revert to nature and reach for the sky unless you prune rather drastically in April, reducing the stems to three-inch stubs, and controlling the "bleeding" by rubbing a little powdered charcoal into the surfaces. If you wish, cut the prunings to six-inch slips which may be rooted to make more plants.

Now repot your freshly pruned poinsettia into fresh soil, water lightly and place in a sunny but cool window. When new shoots sprout from the stubs, thin out to three or four so the plant won't be too bushy. After all danger of frost is past in the late spring, sink the pot to its rim outdoors with morning sun only and keep watering and fed through the summer.

**WHEN FALL** comes bring the plant inside. It is essential that the plant receive 12-14 hours of unbroken darkness every night, starting the first to second week of October.

Your poinsettia will need lots of sunshine during the day, but it must have the Dracula treatment after the sun sets — keep it in a room where no lights are turned on even momentarily because this would create an artificially long day and would delay blooming.

Given this careful tending and freedom from pest infestations or other adverse conditions, your poinsettia should give you the same amount of pleasure next Christmas as it did this year.



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