

EXTENSION NOTES



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Gifts that Brighten the Dreariest Day

A popular present during this season of gifting and receiving can be blooming houseplants. Not only are they economical, but they promise to brighten a dreary winter day.

A poinsettia is probably the first plant that comes to mind when we think of the holiday season. What we call “flowers” are really the poinsettia’s brightly colored, leaf-like bracts. The actual flowers are the small and unremarkable-looking reproductive parts in the center of the bracts. Poinsettias come in a wide variety of solid colors and marbled patterns.

A semi-tropical plant originating in Mexico, poinsettias are not fond of extreme temperatures. The best location in your home is away from heat registers, cold drafts and direct sunlight. Cooler home temperatures will prolong their color. Check their soil daily and water when it feels dry. Water sparingly, especially if the pot is enclosed in a wrapper and cannot freely drain. It is difficult to overwinter a poinsettia and bring it into flower next year. Sadly, it is best to dispose of these plants or compost them when “flowers” fade.

Christmas cacti, named for the season in which they bloom, are humidity loving plants, which reflects their Brazilian coast origins. Keeping the soil evenly moist and locating them with other plants, which raises humidity, will prolong bloom time. These plants prefer moderate light with a small amount of direct sun, so placing them near an east-facing window is ideal. Under these conditions, Christmas cacti will often continue growing and produce flowers next year, but the blooms may come anytime between November and February.

Another popular holiday plant is amaryllis. Its lush blooms come in solid white, red, pink or multi-colored. Amaryllis love light, so place them near a bright sunny window. Water thoroughly, but let the soil dry out between waterings. The act of flowering will deplete the energy of the bulb, but if you cut back each stalk when it’s finished blooming, the bulb will renew its energy stores through the leaves. When the weather turns warm and danger of frost is past, move the plants outdoors, first to dappled shade and gradually to brighter sun. In early fall, withhold water to encourage the plants to go dormant. Start watering again about six to eight weeks before you want blooms.

Not all plant gifts come in the form of colorful blooms. Rosemary, often trimmed into the shape of a small Christmas tree, is also a popular and practical gift at this time of year. Set it in a cool, sunny location and keep the soil moist but not saturated. Rosemary will fill your room with a fresh, woody scent as well as

provide you with cuttings for your holiday cooking and beyond. You can also move rosemary outdoors to the garden in spring, but be sure to bring it back indoors before the first freeze.

For more information about houseplants, contact your Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

Upcoming Events:

- **Winter Door Swag Workshops** – December 12th & 16th @ Noon – Call 474-6686 to register.