



Trees and Holiday Plants: Their Care & Feeding

During the holidays many of us give and receive flowering houseplants as gifts. To keep these beautiful bloomers happy be careful to follow the instructions provided by the grower. Some holiday plants stay healthy and blooming with little care, but others are difficult to maintain. Here are some tips on plant selection to start you off with a healthy plant.

- Select a plant with crisp, healthy foliage and an overall healthy appearance
- Carefully check for and avoid plants with wilted or yellowed leaves
- Choose plants with dense, well-colored foliage and strong stems
- Be wary of plants in plastic sleeves that can hide damaged or badly misshapen stems
- If possible buy a plant that has unopened buds for further blooming

Selecting a Fresh Cut Tree Each tree should have a healthy, green appearance. Hold the tree upright at the top and thump it on the ground. Some of the dried, inner needles may fall, but if any of the outer, green needles should fall, do not purchase that tree. Next, look at the cut end of the tree. A fresh tree will have sap flowing. And finally, bend the needles slightly to make sure they will snap back. Needles should appear fresh and flexible and should not come off in your hand if you gently stroke a branch.

How To Care For A Fresh Cut Tree You should first cut approximately a half-inch to an inch off the end of the trunk just prior to fitting the tree into its stand. Fill the container with water, and make sure to keep it full throughout the holiday season. A tree may take up to a gallon of water for the first twenty-four hours and several pints each day thereafter. A 6 foot tree will use 1 gallon of water every 2 days. As long as the tree is able to absorb and transpire water it will stay reasonable fresh and fire-resistant. Special preservatives such as sugar, aspirin, or cola are not needed to preserve freshness. Do not place your tree near fireplaces, heaters, furnace vents, or television sets. Use only UL-approved lights, and no more than 3 strands should ever be hooked together. Candles should never be used because they are a fire hazard. Lights should always be unplugged when leaving home or going to bed. Your tree has uses after the holiday season. Place it in the garden or backyard for use as a bird feeder. Orange slices, bread, and suet hung from the tree will attract birds and brighten up the winter landscape. In addition, your tree is biodegradable; its branches and trunks may be removed and used as mulch in your garden. Branch tips and needles provide aromatic stuffing for sachets.

How To Care For A Living Tree Bringing a tree indoors causes the tree unusual stress. Keep it indoors for only a few days to prevent it from breaking dormancy. Never leave your tree indoors for more than 10 days. To lessen the shock of bringing the tree into a heated home let the tree sit in a garage for 3 or 4 days. If the tree is not already in a planter the root ball should be set into a pot or other container. While the tree is indoors, keep it away from all heat sources and check the moisture in the root ball daily. Do not decorate your tree with heat-producing lights or candles.

AMARYLLIS Place the pot in a warm spot (70°) that is shaded from direct sunlight. Place in a bright location but out of direct sun while blooming. Long, leggy flower stalks indicate insufficient light. Stake stalk if taller than 18 inches. Do not over water.

AZALEA When flowering, azaleas need 4 hours of bright, filtered sunlight in a south-facing window. Flowers last longest at cool (55° F) temperatures. High humidity is also important for flowering, to prevent spider mite infestations, and to prevent foliage drop caused by dry air. Also, remove the flowers when they fade. If plants begin to grow, pinch them back

until they can be set outdoors. Azaleas like acidic conditions. Applications of a soluble fertilizer (5-10-5) will retain foliage quality.

CHRYSANTHEMUMS These lovely plants prefer an average to cool house temperature (62° is ideal). Bright, indirect light or at least a half a day of full sun is suggested. The flowers will not fully develop unless enough light is given. Keep the soil moist but not wet. No fertilizer is needed while the mum is in flower.

CYCLAMEN Resist the temptation to select a plant that is in full bloom. Get a cyclamen with more buds than flowers to insure a longer floral display. Put the plant in a cool window that faces east or west with bright, indirect light. For best flowering, keep humidity high and temperatures cool (60° F). These plants are very sensitive to temperature fluctuations and indoor temperatures are too high to retain good quality flowers for any length of time. NEVER get the plant itself wet when you water because this encourages stem rot. After the bloom period continue watering and feeding the cyclamen, keeping it in a bright window until it blooms again.

GARDENIA To induce flowering and stop bud drop, keep humidity high and night temperatures approximately 60°. Gardenias need 4-6 hours of direct light daily to flower. Avoid drafts, which cause leaves to yellow and drop. Water only after the top inch of soil is dry.

HOLIDAY CACTUS These plants like bright light but not direct sun. Place the plant where it will have a half-day of bright, indirect sunlight or curtain-filtered direct window light will result in more blooms. Plants in bloom will hold their flowers longer in cooler temperatures. Cactus flowers drop quickly if temperatures are continuously above 70° F or if they are too dry. If you over water the plant the buds will fall off, too. Provide high humidity levels.

JERUSALEM CHERRY This does well in the typical indoor environment. It likes a 50° to 55° night temperature and bright, indirect light or full sun. The soil can dry out between waterings. Fertilize monthly. After fruits and leaves drop, cut stems back 2-3 inches. Repot, water and fertilize.

KALANCHOE This is a showy perennial pot plant and the perfect gift for someone who kills everything. Give plants at least a half-day of bright, direct sun. Let pots dry out between watering. Kalanchoe thrives in dry air. Keep the temperature cool and you may not need to water during the holiday season. Bright sunlight prompts reddish tints to leaves. Cut off spent flowers at the beginning of the stalk. No fertilizer is needed while it is in flower.

ORNAMENTAL PEPPER This plant has attractive red, white or purple fruit. It needs bright or filtered light. Check soil for dryness by pushing your finger into the soil. If the soil feels cool or damp, there is still moisture in the soil. Keep in mind that it is able to withstand drought better than wet soil. Do not place outdoors in a hot, sunny area, as they will burn.

PAPERWHITE NARCISSUS Keep the bulbs by a window on the east or north side, which should be cooler than the rest of the house. The lower the temperature, the more compact the plants. Also, the brighter the light the shorter the plant will be. Paperwhites can also be grown in water alone. They require no fertilizer.

POINSETTIA Poinsettias dislike sudden temperature changes, low light or improper watering. Give them a bright window that is not in direct sun. Water the plants thoroughly when the soil surface is dry to the touch. Discard any water that collects in the saucers because poinsettias don't like wet feet. Try to keep them away from hot, dry air and cold drafts. If they lose their leaves too quickly it is a sign of poor growing conditions.

TOPIARY PLANTS Follow the grower's instructions that are given on the plant label. Ivy is particularly susceptible to spider mites so be careful to avoid direct sunlight and prevent soil from drying out. Cool temperatures, moist but not wet soil, and an occasional misting of water will keep your topiary thriving. Do not be afraid to trim your topiary occasionally to keep its shape.



PLANT	WATER	TEMPERATURE	LIGHT
Amaryllis	Keep evenly moist during flowering	65 - 70° F days 50 - 60° F nights	High
Azalea	Keep soil evenly moist	60 - 68° F days 45 - 55° F nights	Moderate
Chrysanthemum	Keep uniformly moist but not wet	60 - 75° F days 55 - 60° F nights	High
Cyclamen	Keep uniformly moist	60 - 65° F days 50 - 55° F nights	Moderate
Gardenia	Water only after the top inch of soil is dry	65 - 70° F days 60 - 65° F nights	High
Holiday Cactus	Keep uniformly moist during flowering	70 - 75° F days 60 - 65° F nights	High
Jerusalem Cherry	Soil may become slightly dry between waterings	60 - 70° F days 50 - 55° F nights	High
Kalanchoe	Allow soil to slightly dry between watering	65 - 80° F days 50 - 60° F nights	Moderate
Ornamental Pepper	Keep evenly moist but not wet	70 - 75° F days 60 - 65° F nights	High
Paperwhite Narcissus	Water as needed during bloom	70 - 75° F days 60 - 65° F nights	High
Poinsettia	Water thoroughly when dry to the touch	70 - 75° F days 60 - 65° F nights	Moderate

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