



Happy New Year! I am sure I am not the only one ready for 2021 and a fresh start. If you are one of the lucky ones that receive a holiday plant as a gift, don't be tempted to toss it in the trash when the holidays are over, consider giving them a fresh start as well. Keep your holiday plants alive for years to come with a few tips and techniques.

Poinsettias don't have to be tossed as soon as the holidays are over. They can be kept for many years. Treat poinsettias as houseplants throughout the winter, making sure not to overwater them. Once temperatures are warm outside, they can be placed there during the summer months. When the night temperatures drop between 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, it is time to bring them back inside. Beginning September 25th, poinsettias need complete darkness from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. daily. This can be done with a simple cardboard box or by putting them in a dark closet. Why? Poinsettias bloom based on day length. Too much light can actually keep the showy bracts from turning color, meaning a boring green plant come holiday time. It usually takes 6-8 weeks of darkness before the bracts start to change color. Another thing to ensure good bract development is to have night temperatures between 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit.

Christmas cactus is another plant that can be given a second chance. Their care is very similar to that of the poinsettia. Treat as a houseplant year-round. Christmas cactus also need short days and cool night temperatures to induce blooming. Starting mid-September to mid-October, cover them with the box, just like with the poinsettia. They should only receive 8 hours of light each day, including artificial light. Flower buds usually develop when night temperatures are around 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Be sure to reduce watering and withhold fertilizer during bud development or the buds may begin to fall off. Flower buds will soon begin to form and the plants will be in full bloom in 2 ½ months or less.

Amaryllis is a popular holiday bulb that can be kept for many years. Allow the bulb to bloom and be sure to remove the spent flowers as soon as they begin to fade. Doing this will keep the plant from putting all of its energy into producing seeds, and instead store it in the bulb. After the plant has finished blooming, cut back the flower stalk and let the long, strap-like leaves collect and store energy in the bulb. Treat the Amaryllis as you would any other houseplant throughout the remainder of the winter.

Amaryllis can also be planted outside. In May, after the frost free date, the bulbs can be planted directly in the ground or in pots. Allow to grow outdoors during the summer, water as needed. As frost approaches, bring the pots and bulbs inside and store them in a cool room, between 45 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Withhold water from the plants, and wait for the foliage to die. The bulbs will require a two to three month rest period before growth and flowering will begin again. Unlike the poinsettia and Christmas cactus, Amaryllis growth and blooming is based upon the availability of water. Once watering is resumed and plants are moved to a warm room, flower buds should appear several weeks. Sadly, not all saved amaryllis bulbs will bloom the following year. A quick trick to know whether or not saved amaryllis will bloom the coming year is to count the leaves. The bulbs that had four or more healthy leaves throughout the summer should have enough stored energy to flower that year. If the bulb had less foliage, there is the possibility that they won't bloom the current year and these bulbs will need another season to collect and store energy before they will bloom.

With a few simple tips and trick we can give these common holiday plants a fresh start in 2021 and turn them into treasures that will be around for many years to come.

Elizabeth Exstrom is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.exstrom@unl.edu, her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.