

Holiday Plants

By Katie Geist: CSU Extension, Colorado Master Gardener Apprentice

County gardeners have been busy preparing gardens for the upcoming winter season. Our bounty has been collected and now there's little to keep a gardener busy. So how about growing some holiday plants!

Poinsettias and Amaryllis are excellent plants to bring into your homes this holiday season. They can add bright color to your festivities, make excellent gifts and can even survive to bloom again next year.

Poinsettias are the top-selling plant in the US with more than 75 million sold over the six-week holiday season. They are a semi-tropical plant, native to Mexico. The showy colored parts of poinsettias that most people think are the flowers are actually colored bracts or modified leaves. The flowers are in the center of the colorful bracts.

Things to consider when selecting a poinsettia:

- Choose plants with upright branches, not right-angled branches
- Avoid plants with immature bracts (what we think of as flowers), wilting or drooping foliage, or yellowed leaves
- Choose a plant with dark green foliage that's full, balanced and attractive from all sides
- Don't choose plants that are displayed in paper or plastic sleeves since they'll deteriorate quickly

Poinsettias are easy to care for. They need temperatures between 60-80 degrees and bright indirect light. Keep them away from drafts or high traffic areas. Check the soil daily. If wrapped in holiday foil, punch holes in the foil so water can drain into a saucer. Water when the soil is dry. Allow water to drain into the saucer and discard excess water. Fertilize the poinsettia if you keep it past the holiday season. Apply a houseplant fertilizer once a month. Do not fertilize when in bloom.

To rebloom, consider they need short days, less than 12 hours of light, to set flowers. It may be necessary to artificially shorten the plant's day by placing it in a dark space or covering it with a can or box.

Amaryllis plants are beautiful bloomers and come in a wide variety of colors and sizes. You can easily start them in your home from bulbs. The bulbs can take 7-10 weeks to flower so plan accordingly if you want holiday blooms.

Choose healthy, firm bulbs with no soft spots or rot. First put the bulb base and roots in lukewarm water for a few hours. Plant the bulb in a pot that is 3 inches wider than the bulb with open drain holes. Be careful not to damage the roots. Position the bulb so that the top 50% is above the soil. Any good commercial soil can be used. Water it once. Do not water it again until growth is visible or the soil becomes very dry, and then water

sparingly. Place it in a warm place with direct light, ideally between 68-70 degrees. Once the bud and leaves appear you can water it more frequently.

When your Amaryllis blooms, place it in a cool room, with bright, indirect light. Keep the soil evenly moist. Do not fertilize while blooming. If necessary, stake the bloom with a wire plant support or thin bamboo stick.

After your Amaryllis finishes blooming, cut the old flowers from the stem and when the stem starts sagging, cut it back to the top of the bulb. If you want the Amaryllis to rebloom, continue to water and fertilize the leaves through the spring and summer. Next fall you can cut the leaves back to 2 inches above the top of the bulb, remove it from the soil and store in a cool dark place (40 – 50 degrees) for a minimum of six weeks. Then you are ready to start the planting process again before the holiday season.

For more information here are some online resources.

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/news/natdeco.html>

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07412.html>

For questions regarding produce, landscape, and horticulture questions; please contact the Teller County, Colorado Master Gardener grow line at 686-7980, or visit our website at www.co.teller.co.us/csu