



Holiday Gift Plant Care

By Deborah Hager

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

So you received a holiday plant or bulbs as a gift—now what? Many plants have become associated with the holiday season, brightening our homes during dark winter days. Here’s how to care for three of the most popular ones.

Poinsettias, native to Mexico, have become one of the most popular holiday plants. The colored portions of the poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are bracts, which are modified leaves. The flowers are located in the center of the colorful bracts. Poinsettias are now many colors as well as the traditional brilliant red. The best place for a poinsettia is near a sunny window where it will receive six hours of bright light but not direct sunlight. Keep the plant away from cold drafts and from touching cold windows. Poinsettias prefer an indoor temperature from 65 to 75 degrees during the day, and above 60 degrees at night. Water the plant only when the soil feels dry and don’t let it sit in water; overwatering causes the plant to wilt and drop leaves. Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous.

Paperwhite narcissus (*Narcissus spp.*) have sweet fragrant blossoms above slender blue green leaves. When these bulbs are planted or forced, or “tricked” into blooming early, they will flower in about four weeks. Paperwhite Narcissus will grow and bloom planted in nothing more than water and stones. Begin by carefully placing a layer of stones to a depth of about two inches in a small container or four inches in a larger container. Next, place a layer of bulbs close to each other, roots facing down. Put a few stones around and between the bulbs to anchor them in the container. Leave the tops of the bulbs exposed. Add water until the level reaches just below the base of the bulbs but no higher; they may rot if they are sitting in the water. Place the container

December 25, 2019

in a cool place away from direct light. Check the bulbs frequently and water when needed. When roots develop, move the container to a sunny spot. Narcissus bulbs can also be planted in containers with potting mix.

Amaryllis bulbs (*Hippeastrum* hybrids) are among the easiest plants to grow and bloom during the holidays. They have amazing flowers, mostly in shades of red, pink and white. Amaryllis are tropical bulbs, native to South America, and are prized for their willingness to produce large, colorful flowers indoors in the winter. They require warm temperatures, strong light and water to deliver flowers in about six weeks. Plant the bulb in potting mix so that the top third of the bulb is exposed. Growth begins in about two weeks. Take care not to overwater the amaryllis bulb. Provide ample sunlight and rotate the pot frequently to prevent the flower stalks from leaning toward the light.

With a little care, these popular plants will grow, bloom and reward you with cheery flowers and foliage throughout the winter months.

There are no Master Gardener classes scheduled for the coming weekend, but the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public on Saturday, January 4, from 9:00 AM till 12:00. Arrive by 9:15 a.m. for a guided tour of the garden.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.