

**REBLOOMING YOUR HOLIDAY PLANTS:
Poinsettias, Azaleas, Amaryllis, Geraniums**
by Gordon Sheldon, Rome Garden Club

POINSETTIAS: Some of us keep our poinsettias over after Christmas and like to see them blossom again at Christmas time. With special treatment, it's possible to get a satisfactory show of color from them in succeeding years. Probably they are not as good as a greenhouse-grown plant, but still not bad, and you have the satisfaction of doing it yourself. First, you must realize that the bright-colored leaves on poinsettias are not the flowers. The leaves rather insignificant yellow buds in the center of each group of colored leaves are the true flowers. In order to get succeeding years of color, it's necessary to keep your poinsettia healthy and growing after Christmas. It should be placed in a sunny window, not too cold, and kept watered all winter. If it gets dry or chilled, it may drop some leaves, but this is not always fatal.

In the spring, trim back the plant. It may need to be moved to a larger pot with additional potting soil. Try not to disturb the roots too much. After the weather is permanently warm, it can be set outdoors for the summer. Sinking the pot in the garden is fine, but turn it occasionally to prevent roots from growing out of the drainage holes. Poinsettias do not like their roots disturbed. I once set one in a bed out of its pot. It grew luxuriantly, but when I tried to take it up in the fall and pot it up, the leaves wilted and fell off, and it never came back. Keep it watered and fertilized through the summer, and before the first frost, bring it inside.

In order to bloom again, it will need special treatment--twelve to fourteen hours of total darkness at night for up to ten weeks, and a light, sunny window during the day. A closet which will not be opened at night is best, but a black plastic bag might work. Set it in the closet about 6:00 p.m. every evening and bring it out in the morning. Keep it watered and use a little plant food in the water occasionally. When you see a few red bracts (leaves), it can be put on display for the holidays.

AZALEAS are among the most colorful Easter plants, and we hate to discard them when they finish blossoming if they are pest-free, healthy, and growing. It's quite possible to get them to flower in succeeding years with the proper treatment. The azaleas we get from florists are not hardy enough to winter outdoors in upstate New York. However, they will grow well outdoors in their pots all summer. If they need repotting, do it in the spring using peat moss or a mixture of peat moss and potting soil. Keep them in a location where they get morning sun. A little Miracid in their water through the summer should keep them growing and healthy. Before the first frost, bring your plant into a very cool, light room, and place it in an east or south facing window.

Sometime after January 1, some buds should start to show color. In can then be brought into a warmer area for display. We treated a pink one this way last year, and it was a solid mass of blossoms in late winter and early spring. they last longer in a cool room--kept moist but not waterlogged. This same azalea has blossomed sparingly this fall with twelve or fifteen scattered blooms.

AMARYLLIS should be treated the same way as azaleas. Keep them growing after they flower and sink the pot in the garden after frost. Keep them watered and fertilized through the summer. In the fall, discontinue watering and if the foliage yellows, cut it off above the bulb. The bulb should be stored in a cool dark cellar, either in or out of the pot. After a couple of months, it can be repotted in fresh potting soil, and as soon as new growth shows up, it can be brought into a cool, light room and watered. Amaryllis are unpredictable, but with this treatment they should flower again.

I'm often asked how **GERANIUMS** can be kept over until next year. I have to admit that I have not found a foolproof way to do it. Some people have luck pulling them before frost and hanging them upside down in a cool root cellar. That didn't work for me. Taken up with as much soil and roots as possible, trimmed back and kept in a cool light window, a few lived over. Probably the best solution is to take cuttings before they freeze. Use ends of stems--three or four inches long--with the lower leaves removed. Set in moist, sterile sand or vermiculite, they should develop new roots in a month. Keep them in a light, cool (60 degree) room, and when new growth starts, pot them up in three or four inch pots in a loamy, potting mix with plenty of humus. After potting, keep them out of direct sun for a few days. After that, a cool, sunny window will produce the sturdy plants we want. If they start getting leggy, they can be pinched back to keep them compact and stocky.

Geraniums started from seed in December, if well grown, will start to blossom by Memorial Day. This is one inexpensive way to get a quantity of geraniums for bedding. It may entail use of fluorescent lights to keep them growing and healthy during the short, dark days of winter.

Gordon Sheldon is a member of the Rome Garden Club, New York. Gordon received an award for Horticultural Journalism at the Annual Rome Garden Club Awards Banquet on Monday, October 23, 2000. Sheldon's daughter writes, "We are very proud of all his accomplishments!"

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