



Caring for and Reblooming Flowering Plants

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African Violet – few houseplants are as popular as the African violet but they are somewhat unpredictable and exacting in their requirements. When you bring the plant home, provide temperatures of at least 65-70°F at night and 10 to 15 degrees higher in the daytime. Night temperatures below 60°F are undesirable. Proper light is extremely important – they need good light. In summer, a north window is suitable. As fall approaches, move the plant to a brighter window. Too much light will burn the leaves and flowers, and the plant will be compact with abnormally colored foliage. African violets grow extremely well under fluorescent lights. Keep the soil moist but not overly wet. Use a soluble houseplant fertilizer every two weeks during spring and summer. Repot the plant only when the roots become matted around the sides of the soil ball. Clean the plant by syringing the leaves with lukewarm water or by dusting with a soft brush.

Amaryllis – The amaryllis is a popular gift plant during the holidays. Keep the blooming amaryllis in a relatively cool, humid location to retain the lasting quality of the flowers. Bright light is not important since there is usually little foliage at the time of flowering. Adequate watering, however, is necessary. The secret to getting amaryllis bulbs to rebloom year after year lies largely in the summer care after flowering. Remove the withered blooms and stalks immediately after flowering but do not cut off the leaves. Continue to give the plant good growing conditions indoors. Keep the plant in full sunlight and water as needed. Once the danger of frost is passed in the spring, sink the pot into the soil up to the rim. Choose a location that is partly shaded but receives morning sunlight. Apply a soluble houseplant fertilizer every two weeks. Good care allows the bulb to replenish its food reserves and produce buds for another season of bloom. In the fall, gradually withhold water. When the foliage dies down, trim it off and take the pots to a cool, dark, dry basement. Amaryllis need a two- to three-month rest period. Do not water or fertilize during this time. When buds begin to push out in the winter, place the pots in a warm window and water well. Once in flower, put the plants in a cooler location.

Azalea – The azalea's striking flowers of pink, rose, red, salmon, and white brighten any home. Purchase plants with many buds and just a few opened flowers. It is helpful to occasionally mist the leaves with tepid water. Never let the soil dry out thoroughly. A good way to water is to completely submerge the entire pot in a deep pan or sink of water. When the soil is saturated, remove the pot and let the excess water drain off. The azalea can be re-flowered, but it requires proper conditions. *In most cases, it is best*

to enjoy the plants and discard them after flowering is over. However, if you want to attempt to rebloom the plant, here are some suggestions. After flowering, remove all the withered flowers and keep the plant in a cool, sunny location. It should continue to grow actively. In mid-May, put the plant in a partly shaded site outside. Keep the soil moist and fertilize every two weeks with a soluble houseplant fertilizer. Keep the plant outdoors as long as you can in the fall, but bring it inside before frost to a very cool room with full sun. A temperature of 40-50 °F from November to January is optimal. Continue to give care during this period, but reduce watering and withhold fertilizer. Without a cold treatment, few flower buds will form. As the buds swell in January or February, move the plant to a sunny window and fertilize regularly. The temperature at this time should be about 60 °F. with plenty of humidity.

Calceolaria -- The calceolaria's balloon-like flowers have given the plant its common name "pocket-book plant". Although it is a fun and spectacular gift plant, it is grown in limited quantities because of its shortcomings. Its care and culture is similar to the cineraria. Once the plants are done flowering, they will not bloom again satisfactorily and shouldn't be kept on as a houseplant.

Christmas Cactus – This succulent is a long-time favorite of the holiday season. It is available in a wide range of colors including red-orange, salmon, deep rose, red, lilac, and white. There is often confusion between the Christmas cactus and Thanksgiving cactus. The stem segments of the Christmas cactus have scalloped margins while those of the Thanksgiving cactus are pointed. Regardless of type, keep the plants in bright, indirect sunlight while it is in flower. Too much sun will cause the flowers to fade. A temperature of 60-65 °F during the night and 70 °F during the day is ideal. Once the plant drops its flowers, continue to grow it as a houseplant until the next year. Continue to keep it in bright light and water only when the soil becomes thoroughly dry. Some gardeners place their plants outdoors after frost is passed. Choose a protected, shady location and continue to water and feed as needed. Holiday cacti are short day plants, meaning that they set their flower buds as days shorten in the fall. If you placed the plants outdoors, leave them out for as long as possible to take advantage of the cool temperatures. If you kept the plant indoors, move it to a cool room (an unheated room is ideal) to initiate flower bud formation.

Chrysanthemum – Potted mums are one of the most popular gift plants for all seasons. Even though the normal flowering time for mums is fall, they are 'forced' into bloom every month of the year. To get maximum flowering, purchase plants that still have many partially opened buds. One that is showing mostly open flowers will not be in bloom for long. Potted mums tend to dry out quickly, so check the soil frequently. Place the plant in a bright location out of direct sunlight to avoid fading the flowers. A cool (60-65 °F) location at night is ideal. Avoid dry, overheated rooms in the daytime. Once the plant is done flowering, discard it since they are difficult to rebloom.

Cineraria – The cineraria is a striking plant because of its vivid flower colors. When you buy one, it is virtually a mound of flowers and buds. With good light, plenty of water, and very cool temperatures, its flowers will last a long time. Keep the plant in bright light and out of direct sun. The ideal temperature is 48-50°F at night and 60-65 °F during the daytime. The plants will wilt if the soil is the least bit dry, so water them thoroughly and often. Cinerarias are treated as annuals and cannot be grown on as a houseplant. Discard them after flowering.

Cyclamen – The cyclamen makes a wonderful wintertime gift and holiday plant. It is usually purchased with several flowers and many buds in all stages of development. To get maximum flowering from this plant, give it good light and cool temperatures (50-55 °F at night and 60-65 °F during the day are ideal). An ideal place is an un-shaded east window. Check the soil moisture regularly. This plant requires plenty of water and good drainage. Keep the water out of the foliage crown. Handled properly, a plant with lots of buds will bloom for two to three months. Bud blasting and yellowing leaves result from hot, dry atmospheres, lack of water, or insufficient light.

Easter Lily – The Easter season isn't complete without this traditional plant. When kept in a cool, draft-free place, this plant will hold its blooms for several weeks. For optimum flowering, give the plant bright light but not direct sun. Keep the soil evenly moist but avoid over-watering and never let the pots stand in water for any length of time. Remove the yellow anthers that contain the pollen from newly-opened flowers. This prevents the white petals from being discolored with the yellow pollen. Take off the old flowers promptly. After blooming, keep the plant in a sunny window and continue to water until the foliage begins to yellow. Then withhold water and let the soil dry thoroughly. When the leaves have withered, cut the stem off and store the pot in a cool, dark place until May. At that time, remove the bulb from the pot and plant it outside in a sunny, protected, well-drained garden spot at a depth of 6 inches. They may survive and bloom in the garden for several years if heavily mulched in the winter but they aren't reliably hardy in Illinois.

Gardenia – The gardenia, with its lush green foliage and fragrant waxy-white flowers makes a handsome gift plant, but to grow it on will take all the gardening abilities you have. They are not really very satisfactory flowering houseplants but some people keep them for their glossy foliage. Uniform and exacting conditions are necessary to grow gardenias successfully. Give them full sun in a south window during the cooler months of the year. Provide temperatures of about 60 °F at night and 68-74 °F during the daytime. Maintain the highest humidity possible and mist the foliage frequently. Keep the soil uniformly moist and make sure there is good drainage. Check often for insects since the gardenia is a favorite of mealybug, spider mites, thrips, and scale insects. 'Bud drop' is the most common problem. Some factors that contribute to this include lack of soil moisture, low humidity, water-logged soil, insufficient light, atmosphere too cold or warm, and rapid temperature fluctuations.

Martha Washington Geranium – This variety of geranium, also called Fancy Geranium or Pansy Geranium, has large, showy, often blotched flowers in clusters at the top of the plant. It is far more showy than the common bedding geranium used as an annual, but far more difficult to grow. Keep the plants blooming in bright light, just out of direct sunlight, with uniform but very cool temperatures and plenty of water. Unfortunately, the petals drop quickly in the home making it not one of the best gift plants. If you set the plants outside, they usually do not flower because the buds will form only at night temperatures below 55 °F. The best advice is to enjoy it, then discard it.

Gloxinia – The culture of gloxinia is similar to that of the African violet. The mound of large, velvety leaves forms the perfect background for the large trumpet-shaped flowers. Each flower can be as large as 5 inches or more in diameter. The vivid colors include pink, red, purple, blue, and white. Getting a gloxinia to bloom requires warm temperatures (65-70 °F at night and somewhat warmer during the day), a humid atmosphere, and good ventilation. At temperatures below 60 °F at night, the growth is nil. Keep the soil moist but not waterlogged, and make sure the drainage is satisfactory. As with African violets, keep water off the foliage.

Kalanchoe – The kalanchoe is actually a succulent that bears a canopy of red, orange, yellow, or salmon flowers above thick, waxy, green leaves. Dozens of star-shaped blossoms make up each flower head. Choose a plant with most of the flowers still unopened not one in full bloom. Keep the plant in a location with bright light. Like most plants that flower in the winter, kalanchoes grow best where it is cool. Night temperatures of about 50-60 °F will keep it in flower for a long time. Water the plant when the top half of the soil feels dry to the touch. Since this plant is a succulent, it can survive through dry periods better than when the soil is too wet. With average care, a kalanchoe can be kept for another season of bloom. Shift the plant to a larger pot when it becomes rootbound. Fertilize at 2-3 week intervals and continue to water when the soil dries out. You can place the plant outside during the summer in a protected place. Since the kalanchoe forms its flower buds under short day conditions, it should receive only natural light from the time it is brought indoors in early fall until buds show.

Poinsettia – The poinsettia, native to Mexico, is the traditional Christmas plant. The showy colored structures that are often called ‘flowers’ are actually bracts (colored leaves), while the ‘true flowers’ are the yellow parts in the center of each whorl of bracts. Keep the plants at room temperatures between 60 ° and 70 °F with high humidity. Temperatures above 75 °F are detrimental to the plant. Place it in bright light out of direct sunlight. Maintain uniform soil moisture and keep it neither bone-dry nor soggy since these conditions will cause leaf drop. Poinsettias are sensitive to drafts, too cool or too warm temperatures, sudden temperature changes, dry atmosphere, improper watering, and insufficient light. These conditions can lead to withering of the bracts and leaf drop. The poinsettia is one of the most difficult plants to rebloom

successfully, but the one most attempted. In May, set the plant outside in a protected location that receives bright but not direct sunlight. Cut the stems back to six inches. If you need to repot it, this is the time to do so. Keep the plant actively growing all summer by watering regularly and applying a fertilizer every two weeks. As new shoots form, pinch them back to encourage branching. Stop pinching in mid-August. Before autumn, take the plant inside to a south window with full sun. The poinsettia is a short-day plant, so it should be exposed only to natural daylight from the last week in September until bract color shows. That means that it should receive no light after nightfall during this period from a lamp, a light fixture, streetlight, or even a flashlight. Very brief periods of light can delay or interfere with flowering. If possible, keep the plant in a room without lights. With luck, it should be in flower for the holiday season.

Spring bulbs – A pot of tulips, hyacinths, narcissus, or crocus is a welcoming site in the middle of winter. The flowers will last longer if you keep the plant in a bright, cool location with night temperatures around 60 °F. Keep the soil moist but not constantly soggy, and don't fertilize. Once they are done flowering, it is often best to discard them since they expended a lot of food energy in being forced. However, if you wish, you can plant the bulbs outside in the garden and hope they flower the following spring. Cut off the stems when the flowers are gone, but leave the foliage on. Continue to water when the soil dries, and keep the plant in bright light. In late spring, gradually cut down on the watering as the leaves begin to mature (yellow). Keep the plant in a cool, dry location until fall, and then plant them out-of-doors.