

Making Holiday Plants Bloom Again

...Susan Nielsen, 'Good Housekeeping'

While most Christmas plants should be enjoyed for the few weeks they flower, three favorites can be coaxed to bloom at holiday time next year. Here's how:

AMARYLLIS: Once blooming is complete, water when the soil feels dry, and feed the plant one-half strength fertilizer weekly until the leaves turn yellow (about three months). Then, water only enough to keep the soil moist. When the leaves die, store the pot-with the bulb intact—on its side in a cool place, such as a basement. Continue to water the bulb sparingly until a new stem appears. Then place in a bright, sunny window and keep the soil moist.

CHRISTMAS CACTUS: Water the blooming plant only enough to keep the soil moist. In the spring and summer, water it more frequently. Around the end of October, put the cactus in 16 hours of complete darkness (a closet will do), then in 8 hours of daylight each day, watering just enough to keep it moist. When buds appear, you can stop the dark treatment, then feed the plant a half-strength of fertilizer once a week. Once the plant is flowering, it's best to keep it out of direct sunlight.

POINSETTIA: While the plant is blooming, keep it in bright, direct light and water every three to four days (maintain this watering schedule throughout the year). When lower leaves begin to yellow, prune the stems back to about six inches above the soil, and continue pruning through the summer to encourage fullness. In October, put the plant in complete darkness by covering it with something opaque or putting it in a closet (no light leaks!) for 14 hours every evening. Every morning, take the plant out into the light. When buds begin to form in mid-December, keep the plant in bright light.