

HOUSEPLANTS DEPARTMENT



GENERAL CARE FOR GIFT PLANTS

By Dee Beckman

General Care For Blooming Gift Plants *(Excerpts from the Book "House Plant Expert")*

There are two types of flowering plants, and many varieties within those types, which provide a temporary display (blooming "gift" plants/short-lived gift plants) and then there are the varieties that can take up permanent residence in your home (Flowering Houseplants/Patio plants).

Blooming "Gift" Plants fall into the short-lived plant category. Unlike the flowering houseplants, the members of this group may be temporary. The flowers usually only last a few months (with exceptions like bulb plants and specialty plants that only last a couple of weeks). Some have been known to last up to 6 months like the Kalanchoe and the Cyclamen. Once the flowers fade, the next stage depends on the type of plant. Most are thrown away; some can be kept for another year as a houseplant or as a patio /garden plant in the summer, but most are extremely difficult to keep alive or re-bloom. Bulb plants are usually planted outdoors or stored in a cool dark location and then replanted. Each plant requires specific care, this information can be found in houseplant, garden books and/or on the Internet.

You should never choose a blooming houseplant if you want something that will live in your living room as a permanent feature. These plants are for quick color to enjoy for a short amount of time. It is a cardinal rule to check before buying, whether that plant in bloom is a **Flowering House Plant** or a **Short- Lived "Gift" Plant**.

Some of the most spectacular blooming "gift" plants are the Azalea, Cineraria, Gloxinia, Chrysanthemum and Tulip. This group of plants is sometime referred to as "florist" or "gift" plant, and has an essential part to play in the indoor plants scene. During the dark winter months they provide a splash of color when outdoor flowering plants are absent.

The "forced bulb" group provides the basic spring display weeks earlier than they are found naturally. They make excellent gifts for people that don't have green thumbs. After a few weeks or perhaps months, the flowers will fade and in nearly all types, the lower leaves may fall and the plant can possibly die. This is not your fault, because this is a basic feature of this group of plants. Flowers fading and leaf fall should not take place in a matter of days after you have received the plant. This should indicate that something is wrong.

As a general rule Blooming "gift" plants need bright, not direct sun light, cool night conditions between 50 and 60 degrees F, and no more than 10 degree warmer during the day and moderately moist compost. Allow the top 1/3rd of the soil to dry down between watering. Warm air is generally the biggest enemy, which causes the plant to dry out too fast and the flowers and leaves will wither.

Cool loving plants

Azalea, Forced Bulb Plants (Outdoor and Indoor Types), Calceolaria (Pocket Book Plant), Caladium, Campanula, Chrysanthemum, Cineraria, Cyclamen, Dianthus (Carnation), Erica (Heathers), Hydrangea, Assorted Lily's, Primula (primrose) and Solanum (winter cherry)

Temperature: Cool – 50 to 60 degrees F. night temperature.

Light: Bright light, keep away from direct sunlight. If the plant quits blooming, may need to increase the light slightly.

Water: Keep compost moist at all times. Employ the immersion method if the plant ever goes completely dry. Allow the soil to dry down 1/3rd between watering once the flowers have faded.

Air Humidity: Stand plant on a pebble tray with water not allowing the plant to sit in the water. Occasionally mist air around the plant.

Care after flowering: Reduce watering and start feeding. Use an all-purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer. Check for care for that individual plant for special care to induce blooming.

Average warmth plants

Antherium, Begonia, Beloperone (Shrimp Plant), Bromeliad, Capsicum (Ornamental Pepper), Crossandra, Cuphea (Hawaiian Heather), Episcia (Chocolate Soldier), Eucharis (Amazon Lily), Exacum (Persian Violet), Gardenia, Fuchsia, Gloxinia, Hibiscus, Jasmine, Kalanchoe, Lisianthus, Miniature Rose, Saintpaulia (African Violet),

Temperature: Average warmth- Minimum 55 to 60 degrees F. Some plants will require cooler night temps in winter.

Light: Bright light - avoid too much direct sun. A few hours of morning or evening sun in winter are beneficial.

Water: The compost should be kept moist from spring to fall – Allow the soil surface to dry out by 1/3rd between watering. Water thoroughly, but sparingly in winter.

Air Humidity: Moist air is necessary, mist around the plant but do not wet the leaves unless other wise indicated. Wetting of the leaves will cause powdery mildew on Begonia, Episcia spp. and Roses. Gardenia and Jasmine need to be misted regularly.

Care after flowering: Each plant may need specific environment to get it to re-bloom. Usually increasing sunlight just a little may encourage the plant to set flowers. Use an all-purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer about every other watering half strength, as long as it is actively growing. It is best to look up that specific plant in a garden book to get that plants information.