

TIPS ON CARING FOR CYCLAMENS

The florist cyclamen was developed from various species native to the Mediterranean. Its peculiar name is derived from the seed pods twisting to form a circle or 'cyclos' in Greek. Cyclamens are very energy friendly plants in that they thrive in cooler conditions and do well on a well lit and cool windowsill. In nature it goes dormant during the summer months, comes into growth as cooler, damper weather starts, flowers in autumn, winter or spring, and goes dormant again as the summer becomes warm. Cyclamens grow from tubers that are round and rather flat. The tubers are the storage organs that keep the plants alive during their summer dormancy.



When choosing a cyclamen be sure to select one with only a few flowers open. The flower stems should stand straight up, and there should be lots of buds tucked underneath the foliage that will develop and bloom later.

After you have just received a cyclamen, it's important to keep it cool and to water it correctly, making sure not to under- or overwater. To prevent disease problems, it is also a good idea to maintain good air movement around the plant. From late autumn to early spring, provide your plant with as much light as possible. Sunburn is usually not an issue this time of year, although you may want to avoid placing your cyclamen directly in front of a south-facing window.

Aim for temperatures between 40° and 50°F at night and day temperatures less than 68°F. A cyclamen won't be too happy in a house heated much above 70°F, with the dry atmosphere that goes with it. If you are unable to provide cool enough conditions, the plant will survive for a time, but eventually it will develop yellow foliage and its blooming time may be cut short. It will probably tolerate a less than ideal location for a day or two as long as you return it to a better place shortly afterwards. The plant will tolerate indoor conditions even better if you move it to a cool spot at night. Make sure to provide as much light as possible in its daytime location.

Watering incorrectly can cause many problems, especially when too much water has been applied. Always wait until the soil surface feels dry before you water, but don't wait until the plant becomes limp. Do not water the center of the plant or the tuber may rot. A cyclamen prefers to receive a good soaking, then dry out partially before receiving a good soaking again. Allow the plant to drain over a sink or empty the water collection tray beneath the container after a few minutes. This will help prevent the roots from remaining too wet, which can lead to rotting.

Fertilize your cyclamen with a water-soluble fertilizer recommended for use on indoor plants, mixed half strength. Apply it every 3 or 4 weeks, starting about a month after you receive the plant. Overfeeding is more likely to produce foliage than flowers.

Dead flowers or leaves should be removed by giving their stems a sharp tug. If a sharp tug doesn't remove them, wait another day and try again. You don't want to risk yanking out a chunk of the tuber along with other healthy leaves.

After Blooming - Cyclamen Care

When the plant stops blooming, its leaves will begin to turn yellow and it will enter a dormant state. Most people discard the plant at that point. However, you may be able to force it to bloom again. Stop watering when the leaves turn yellow and wither. Keep the pot in a cool place, if possible, and allow the soil to become dry. It may be placed outdoors during the summer in a location where rainfall won't reach it, out of direct sunlight. Once all the leaves have dried, a process that could take up to two months, the tuber may be repotted into a container that is 1 inch larger in diameter than the old pot. This is usually necessary only every 2 years. Use a packaged, peaty soil mixture. The top half of the tuber should protrude above the soil line to assure adequate drainage and avoid tuber rot. Do not water it, as this could trigger new growth prematurely.

In fall when new leaves start to grow, water the soil thoroughly. If you have trouble getting the potting soil to take up water, add a couple drops of hand dish-washing detergent to the water. This will not harm the plant, but will act as a wetting agent. If new growth hasn't occurred by late October you can go ahead and water it. As long as the tubers are still plump and hard, they should be okay. Wait for shoots to appear and the soil to become rather dry --then water thoroughly again.

Re-blooming

When the new leaves emerge from the tuber, move the plant to a bright location, as described in the earlier section under "Getting the Most Out of Your Blooming Plant," and follow the recommended procedures.

The amount of time it will take is uncertain, but if all goes well the plant should eventually bloom again. However, it may not be as spectacular as it was the first time. In other words, the flowers may be smaller, and lighter colored. There may be fewer of them, and their stems may not stand straight up. Still, it is fun to get them to bloom again, and worth the effort if you

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