

# Get the most out of houseplants given as Valentine's Day gifts

Here are a few hints to keep those potted plants you received for Valentine's Day performing for you.

As houseplants, they should be kept in a bright location where nighttime temperatures are at least five degrees cooler than during the day. Water thoroughly when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. Forced bulbs (tulips, narcissus, hyacinths, crocus) should be treated to a liquid fertilizer (20-20-20). This will help the foliage in its task of

making food to be stored in the bulb. Remove spent flowers but keep the leaves growing as long as possible in a sunny window. When the foliage begins to yellow, stop watering and allow the leaves to turn brown. Store in a cool dry place until April when the bulbs should be planted in the garden. Do not expect the results to be as spectacular as newly purchased bulbs but they are definitely worth saving!

Primula veris, the English primrose, with

its bright green leaves and fragrant blooms is a perennial that has been forced for early bloom. After flowering, keep its leaves growing until you can transfer it outdoors. Make the transition as gently as possible gradually acclimatizing it in April to conditions outside. Plant in May in an area that has good moisture retentive soil with dappled shade.

Azaleas are a popular gift plant that can be persuaded to bloom again next winter. After the blooms are finished, enjoy the glossy foliage until late May. Then trim the plant back to one-third its size and transplant to a slightly larger pot. Plunge the pot into a semi-shady spot in your garden. A layer of mulch will help keep the soil moist. Azaleas do not like to dry out. They also appreciate a fertilizer that has been formulated for acid-loving plants. Leave the azalea outdoors until the hard frost threatens. Cool nights help to set flowerbuds.

Cyclamens should be kept in



Let's Get Growing

Marjorie Mason Hogue

growth until the decorative foliage begins to deteriorate. Gradually reduce water so the corn can have a rest period. It should summer in a cool dark place. By fall the corn will begin to regrow and will appreciate a cool, sunny location.

Chrysanthemums can be recycled to grow in the garden but generally the varieties chosen as pot plants do not make good garden subjects so usually I compost them when spent. The daisy-like cineraria with its blue or burgundy and bicolor blooms is an annual grown from seed so it is also destined for the compost after flowering.

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