

## Holiday Plants – Handout

### What We Will Cover

- Plants we will discuss
  - Poinsettias
  - Holiday Cactus
  - Amaryllis
- Selection
- Care after bringing them home
- What to do when the blooms are gone

### Plants

- Holiday Plants - Poinsettia
  - Available with many different colored Bracts
    - Red
    - White
    - Pink
    - Peach
    - Yellow
    - Marbled
    - Speckled
  - 80% sold in the US are Red
  - Bracts are specialized leaves, not flowers
  - They are designed to attract pollinators
  - Originally an outdoor plant native to the West Coast of Mexico
  - Can grow to be 12 feet tall
  - Joel Roberts Poinsett brought them to the USA on a plant exchange program in 1800s
  - Paul Ecke Sr. of California developed a poinsettia plant that would grow indoors
  - Became the No. 1 selling plant in the US
  - December 12 is Poinsettia Day (also the date Poinsett died)
- Holiday Plants – Holiday Cactus
  - Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter cacti
  - Bloom times
  - Thanksgiving – Late November to late December
  - Christmas – Late December through March
  - Easter – March through May
  - Depending on species, available in shades of
    - Red
    - White
    - Orange
    - Pink

- Purple
- They are true cacti
- Originally from the mountainous jungles of Brazil
  - They are epiphytic plants
  - Their roots anchor them to branches high up in forest trees or in shady areas of cliffs
- The three species can be identified but the shape of the stems
- Holiday Plants - Amaryllis
  - Most popular colors are Red and White
  - Also may be
    - Pink
    - Salmon
    - Apricot
    - Rose
    - Deep burgundy
    - Some are bi-colored
  - Flowers range from 4 to 10 inches, either single or double.
  - Native to Peru and South Africa
  - Genus *Amaryllis* comes from the Greek word *amarysso*, which means "to sparkle"
  - Bulbs were brought to Europe in the 1700s
  - Have been known to bloom for up to 75 years
  - Today, most amaryllis are hybrids

#### Selection

- Selection - Poinsettias
  - Look for dark green foliage all the way down the stem and brightly colored bracts
  - Foliage should be fresh, with no wilted foliage
  - Flowers are yellow to green, button-like objects located in the center
  - Flowers should be tightly closed with no yellow pollen showing
  - Also, check the undersides of the leaves for Whiteflies – a common problem for poinsettias
  - Put the plant in a protective sleeve before taking it outside
  - Temperatures below 50 degrees can damage the bracts and leaves
  - Even brief exposure to freezing temps can cause the leaves and bracts to drop off
  - Never leave a poinsettia outside in a cold car
- Selection – Holiday Cactus
  - Foliage should be sturdy and a healthy green
  - Be sure there are new flower buds
  - Don't buy plants that appear to be 'bloomed out'
  - Carefully wrap plants before taking them outside
  - Exposure at freezing temperatures can damage leaves and cause flower drop

- Check to make sure the soil isn't wet
- Avoid diseased or insect-damaged plants
- Selection - Amaryllis
  - Look for the largest bulbs
    - Will produce more stalks and blooms
    - Large bulb = more flowers
  - Bulbs should be firm and dry
  - Check for signs of mold, decay or injury.
  - Some growth may have already started
  - The new growth should be bright green, without spots or other damage
  - Any off-shoots will in time grow into a new bulb

#### At Home Care

- At Home Care - Poinsettias
  - Once home, immediately unwrap your poinsettia
  - Place it near a sunny window or other well-lighted area
  - Don't let the plant touch the cold windowpane
  - Keep your poinsettia away from cold drafts or heat outlets
  - Poinsettias prefer temperatures between 60° to 70° F
  - Make sure there is a drainage hole in the pot or decorative sleeve
  - Check the potting soil daily using the finger test
  - When the soil is dry to the touch, it's time to water
  - Take it to the sink and water the plant until it freely flows out the bottom of the pot
  - Discard the excess water which drains into the saucer.
  - Both over- and underwatering cause problems
    - The lower leaves of overwatered plants turn yellow and drop.
    - Dry plants wilt and also drop leaves prematurely.
- At Home Care – Holiday Cactus
  - Once home immediately remove the wrapping
  - Place in a location that provides bright, indirect light
  - Temperatures should be 60° to 70°F, ideally cooler at night
  - Soil should be kept evenly moist during flowering
  - Flower buds will drop if ...
    - They receive too much light
    - Are exposed to drafts or temperature extremes
    - The soil gets too dry or too wet
- At Home Care - Amaryllis
  - Amaryllis grow best in narrow containers.
  - Select one that is 1" wider than the bulb and twice as tall
  - Make sure your container has good drainage to prevent root rot
  - A used dryer sheet in the bottom of the pot will keep the potting material in the pot

- Fill the pot about half full with sterile, new potting soil high in organic matter such as peat moss.
- Set the bulb on top of the potting soil so the top sits above the edge of your container
- Surround the bulb with additional potting soil
- Leave 1/3 to 1/2 of the bulb above the soil line
- Firm the potting medium around the bulb
- Water thoroughly, allowing the excess to drain out.
- Place your new Amaryllis in a sunny window
- Water whenever the top 2 inches of soil feels dry
- Fertilizing is important – use at one half the recommended strength each time you water
- Every fertilizer package provides three numbers like 10-20-15 representing the levels of nutrients
- These numbers represent the percentage of N (nitrogen) – P (phosphorous) – K (potassium)
- Phosphorus is key to flower development
- Chose a fertilizer that has more phosphorus than either nitrogen or potassium
- When buds begin to open, move the plant out of direct sunlight

#### When the Blooms are Gone

- Blooms are Gone - Poinsettias
  - Consider whether keeping your poinsettia going all year is worth it
  - They're relatively inexpensive
  - Will the effort be worth it?
  - Do you have enough room both in- and out doors?
  - They won't necessarily be attractive year-round
  - Many experts would say, cut your losses and put it in your compost pile
  - However, if you want to try here are some dates to help you remember when to do what
  - Tie your care schedule to specific holidays
  - New Year's Day along with starting your resolutions
    - Fertilize with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer
    - Continue to water and provide adequate light
  - Valentine's Day
    - Check for insects such as white fly – treat if necessary
    - Is your plant leggy? Cut back to about 5 inches
  - St. Patty's Day
    - Cut off faded and dried parts
    - Add more sterile soil mix
    - Keep in a bright interior location
  - Memorial Day

- Trim 2 – 3 inches off branches – promotes side branching
  - Repot to a larger container using sterile soil mix
- Father's Day
  - Move plant outside for the summer
  - Place in indirect light – dappled shade
- Fourth of July
  - Trim the plant again
  - Move to full sun location (> 6 hours/day)
  - Fertilize to accelerate growth
- Labor Day
  - Move indoors where it will get < 6 hours of direct sun
  - As new growth starts, reduce amount of fertilizer
- Autumnal Equinox (~September 21)
  - Provide 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness
  - Follow with 11 hours of bright light
  - Maintain night temperatures in the low 60°F range
  - Continue to water and fertilize
  - Rotate the plant daily to give all sides even light
- Thanksgiving
  - Discontinue short day/long night
  - Provide > 6 hours of direct light
  - Reduce water and fertilizer
- Christmas – Enjoy!! (Was it worth it??)
- Blooms are Gone– Holiday Cactus
  - After flowering, place plants in a slightly cooler area and water less frequently.
  - Keep plants on the dry side throughout the winter
  - When active growth begins in spring start watering regularly
  - Fertilize about once a month during spring and summer
  - Holiday Cacti flowering is controlled by temperature and light (or day length)
  - To initiate flowering
    - Place the plants in a cool location (50° to 65°F)
    - Provide only natural light
  - Once you've moved them, leave them be
  - Bud drop can occur from:
    - Moving plants around
    - Drafts
    - Excessive watering
- Blooms are Gone – Amaryllis
  - Want to save your bulb for next year?
  - Keep the plants actively growing AFTER the blooms are gone

- Cut the flowers when they fade
- This prevents seed formation
- Reserves important energy for the bulb
- However, leave the stalk until it turns yellow
- Move your plant back to a sunny location
- Continue to water and fertilize
- Come spring move your Amaryllis
- Acclimate it by moving it out to a shady spot
- Slowly move it to its summer home in a sunny location (6 hours minimum/day)
- Plant the Amaryllis (pot and all) in the ground or leave on a patio.
- Fertilize monthly to build up nutrients in the bulb Bring indoors before the first frost as they won't survive frost or freezing temperatures
- Amaryllis will re-bloom on their own, but ...
- ... you want them to bloom at Christmas
- Put them in a dark location where it's 50°- 60° F
- Let the leaves dry out and then cut them off
- Leave in the dark for 8-12 weeks without watering
- When new growth appears, the flowering process starts all over again
- If new growth hasn't started, move the plant to a sunny window
- Amaryllis take 4-6 weeks to bloom
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