

# Cyclamen – A Special Holiday Gift for the Home

by Diane Keller, Fairfax Master Gardener

Holiday gift giving time is here, and you are so excited to receive a beautiful Cyclamen as a present. It is beautiful! The blooms are full, and the flower petals are delicate and pretty. The sweet smell that rises from the Cyclamen gets your mind racing back to the blooms of spring and the long sun-filled days. Cyclamens are a common gift during the holiday season and with not much effort, they can bloom for a long period of time.

Why give the gift of a Cyclamen plant during the holiday season? Depending on the color, this flower can have different meanings. The red Cyclamen is a symbol of love, the white Cyclamen is symbolic of tenderness and the pink Cyclamen is a symbol of budding love. These meanings give the giftee a special thought to go along with the beautiful blooms.

Cyclamens are a native species from the Mediterranean region. They grow from tubers from which the leaves, flowers and roots grow. They have heart-shaped leaves and petals that turn upwards. Often called the poor man's Orchid, they are from the Primrose family of plants, and they are perennial. There are currently 24 species of Cyclamens, but the most common florist Cyclamen is the persicum. These indoor Cyclamens are typically pure or hybrids of the Persian Cyclamen. Other species suitable for indoors include *Cyclamen africanum*, *Cyclamen creticum*, and *Cyclamen cyprium*. This type of hybrid does not do well in the outdoor environment or adjust well to the winter winds and frost. Outdoor Cyclamens are heartier and can tolerate cooler temperatures. They are the perfect plant for that shady spot in your yard that needs some color.



Many colors of Cyclamen blooms

photo: Wisconsin Horticulture



Cyclamen combination with other houseplants

photo: Mississippi State University

When receiving a Cyclamen as a gift during the holidays, how does one keep this blooming gift of happiness alive and healthy? Here are a few suggestions to make your plant last. Watering a Cyclamen can be tricky. Too much watering can cause root rot. Signs of root rot are yellowing and wilting leaves despite having watered your plant. If you detect root rot, it might be best to wait until the soil dries out before the next watering. To help prevent root rot, water away from the center of the plant so that the tubers do not become waterlogged. You can also place your Cyclamen in a tray with water for about 15 minutes. Once the roots and soil have soaked up all the water they need, remove the Cyclamen from the tray and discard the remaining water. Remember: more cyclamens die from overwatering than from drought.

Cyclamens thrive in cool temperatures and indirect light. It would be best to place a Cyclamen in an east facing window or somewhere in the house where there is no direct sunlight. Also, check to make sure that there are no heating air vents that will blow directly onto your plant.

Another suggestion to keep your Cyclamen alive and healthy would be to check the container that the Cyclamen is planted in. Make sure that there are drainage holes on the bottom of the container so that excess water can drain away from the roots. If you need to repot your Cyclamen, choose a container that will draw moisture away from the soil such as clay or terracotta.

A Cyclamen plant that is kept in the house will almost continuously bloom if it is well taken care of by watering and fertilizing. If your Cyclamen does not continue to bloom or has finished flowering, allow the leaves and flowers of the plant to die off. Water your plant sparingly at this time. Allow the Cyclamen to enter its dormancy period for about 60 days. After the dormancy period, begin to water your Cyclamen once again. Add occasional fertilizer and nurture your plant back to a beautiful blooming state.

Cyclamens are wonderful gifts to give someone during the holidays. These beautiful plants will give you a taste of spring during the cold winter months and bring color and warmth to your holiday decorations and beyond.



photo: University of Maryland

#### References

- [Cyclamen Society](#), Frequently Asked Questions
- [Cyclamen persicum](#), North Carolina Extension
- [Care of Specialty Potted Plants](#), Virginia Cooperative Extension
- [Hardy Cyclamen: Creating a Garden Understory](#), Carmine Carosella and Marsha Goldberg, Fairfax Master Gardeners