



Add Some Cheer with Cyclamens

by Pam Wallace, UCCE Master Gardener

Now that gray winter days are here, it's time to start thinking of ways to add color to your garden. What I miss most during winter is flowers in the yard. But I found an answer to those dull winter landscape doldrums.

Potted cyclamens in cheerful shades of white, pink, rose, and red line the shelves in stores in late fall. Their colorful flowers resemble shooting stars or butterflies.

How many of you have bought a cyclamen, placed it on your porch, and then thrown it away in the summer when it died back? Did you know that the cyclamen is a bulb that will grow year after year? And did you realize that cyclamen can also be grown in the landscape? I didn't, until one of those accidental mishaps of Mother Nature.

I've always bought one or two potted cyclamens each fall for my front porch. One day I noticed this new foliage growing next to the porch railing. I couldn't quite figure out what plant it was until it started to bloom. Apparently one of the cyclamen set seed and now I have a cluster of plants growing at the base of my porch.

Now I'm on a mission to add cyclamen all over the yard. Each year I buy five or six plants, and hopefully in another couple of years, I'll have a yard full of color during those drab winter days. Last year for Christmas I planted red and white cyclamen in a corner of the yard where I could enjoy their bright color from the windows of my living room when the weather was dismal.

I think the foliage of cyclamen is attractive on its own. Each plant forms a basal clump of heart-shaped dark green leaves with silver veining. Their small size makes them perfect to plant under trees or large shrubs where they'll be protected from the afternoon sun.

Cyclamen are prolific bloomers. Each mature plant can send out as many as thirty long-lasting flowers. They bloom during late fall and spring, although I've found that during a mild winter, they'll bloom for most of the season.



Cyclamen are versatile and remarkably easy to grow. I've found them to be resistant to most pests. Another added plus for those living in the foothills is that they are not attractive to deer.

Here are some tips on their care:

- Potted plants - transplant them into soil or a bigger pot to the same depth they were originally planted.
- Tubers - plant them 6 to 10 inches apart, cover with a half-inch of soil during dormant periods of June-August.
- Find a spot in your yard that has morning sun and afternoon shade in the hot summer months, such as the east side of the house.
- They prefer moist, well-drained soil that can partially dry out between watering. So if there is an empty spot that gets wet when you water the lawn, think about growing cyclamen there. I plant them under deciduous trees so they get direct winter sun.
- Cyclamen will bloom in shade, as in a north-facing exposure, or under evergreen trees, although a little bit of sunlight increases the amount of blooms.
- Plants lose leaves and go dormant in hot weather, but survive if drainage is good and soil is not constantly wet.

So next time you see a cyclamen in the store, don't pass it up because you don't know what to do with it. Grab it up, take it home with you and plant it in your yard. You'll be glad you did when those drab winter doldrums hit and you can look out your window and see colorful blooms.

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