



## No Winter Drabs Here

by Penye Cushing, UC Master Gardener

Cyclamen is a grey day's best accessory.

These beauties are a marvel to our winter flower-starved eyes. They bloom continuously in vibrant shades of crimson, pink or white, and have heart-shaped green foliage often marbled or streaked in silver. Cyclamen start entering the stores early in December, bringing their 8-inch plants into our hearts.

These plants are perennials and worth every dime you'll spend. They are excellent houseplants, continuously blooming for weeks. The plants I have moved outside have bloomed for months! Since their bloom period is so long, it is okay to purchase them when they start blooming for best color choice.

Cyclamen persicum, commonly known as the florist's cyclamen, has many small (1/2 - 3/4") scented flowers held on a long stem rising above the foliage. The flower is shaped like an inside-out umbrella, or a ballerina in mid-leap. Cyclamen blooms naturally in winter to early spring but is forced to bloom in the greenhouse for early holiday sales. A native of the Mediterranean and North Africa, it is hardy in our zone 9 community.

There is plenty of personality here with varied colors and three different sizes from larger standards to tiny miniatures. The leaves are also frequently patterned differently. Here is an opportunity to shop around to feed your need for color.

Here are some tips for growing cyclamen successfully in the house.

- As a houseplant, cyclamen cannot survive year round indoors. Plan to plant them in your garden or to toss them when they are finished blooming.
- Winter humidity is crucial. Keep cyclamen pots on a tray of pebbles above the water. Do not allow the pot to sit in the water. Heat is dry without humidity. Do not place near a fireplace or on top of your old TV. Feed them with a low-nitrogen fertilizer every few weeks only while the plant is in full bloom stage.
- Water well till it drains from bottom of pot, keeping water off the foliage, then place it back onto the pebble humidity tray.



During the winter give your plant bright indirect light. Without enough light, you will get sporadic blooms with spindly growth, a sure indicator of insufficient light. Avoid drafts as well as hot places, as constant cool range 50-60 degrees will suit this plant. They are not fussy and give so much back! If conditions are right, as a houseplant they might not go dormant. Cyclamen can be an excellent house partner with aloe plants.

Outdoors they are smart plants. They do not care for the drought and heat in this valley, so they siesta during the summer! By April the leaves will start to yellow and die back. Keep them shaded with indirect lighting, water occasionally and allow them to rest. When you move your dormant cyclamen outside, keep it in a shaded area out of direct sunlight. You can repot now into a slightly larger pot. Cyclamen grow best in a soil-based standard potting mix with the tubers just above the soil line. Water well while leaves are present, keeping water off the tuber so it doesn't rot. When the leaves start to disappear, reduce water to allow plant to go dormant for two months. New growth will start to appear August-September--repot if needed, and resume watering and feeding. A good time to bring it into the house as an official house plant is when you are still comfortable with the windows open, giving this wonder plant time to acclimate.

Some wonderful varieties to look for include

- Sierra Series: Large 2-3" flowers; white pink, salmon, scarlet, lilac and purple
- "Victoria": open pollinated white ruffled with red mouth and margin
- Scentsation: open pollinated with a strong fragrance in pinks and reds

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