

Patty's Plants December Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 1

December

Patty's Plants

Inside this issue:

Paperwhites	2
Forcing Bulbs for Winter Color	2
How to Force your Bulbs & Planting Chart	3
About Christmas Cactus & Poinsettias	4
Poinsettia care, tips	5
Poisonous Plants	
Amaryllis	6

Burrr... it's Cold Outside

Wish you had fresh color in your home this winter? You can by growing beautiful seasonal flowers during those cold, blustery days of winter here in our Mid-west. There are many different plants to choose from. Some are so easy, all you need to do is add water. Others might need a little more care. But it will be worth it to see those wonderful flowers growing right in your home this winter when there's nothing but white outside. Read on to find out How To Grow:



Oh, the weather outside is frightful...

Amaryllis, Christmas Cactus, Poinsettia and the easiest of all Paperwhites.

Foil Wrap on your Holiday Plants-Friend or Foe

You bring home those gorgeously decorated holiday plants. The foil and bow you've just paid for was a little pricey but you wanted everything to be perfect for this festive season so you splurged. You place your plants around in the spots that you so carefully picked out earlier. After a few days you go to water them. You don't check to see if they needed it, you just watered because you had to get it done (there's so much more to get ready for). Suddenly right before your big event you look at your plants again and they are just not looking perky. In fact they look half dead. You check for water but notice the plants are full of water in the foil wrap. Oh no! It's over watered. The salesperson never told me to poke holes in it. I didn't have time to think about things like that.. You pack up your plants and go right back to the place you bought them. Luckily they give you replacements. You go back home all is good. This time you'll poke the holes in the foil. The festivities are saved. Friend or foe, definitely foe.

Special Recipe For:

Homemade Cinnamon Ornaments

* See last page for:

How To Make Natural Ornaments



Potting Up Paperwhites

There are over 100 distinct varieties of narcissus found in various parts of the world. Some are from the Canary Islands and grow in the volcanic rocks. They are also called “The Sacred Lily” in China.

Paperwhites are delicate looking and add charm to your home during the holidays. They take less than 4 weeks to bloom once they’re planted. Paperwhites are a great growing project for children too, because they are the easiest bulb to grow into a fragrant white or even yellow flower. Children can watch them growing daily, they are that fast.

Now, the scent can be overpowering at times. You will either love it or hate it. I, myself am not particularly fond of the fragrance. They are fun to grow though. If you think you can’t grow anything at all, well you are wrong. These you can grow! Paperwhites do not need to be forced. Here’s how you’ll grow them:

*Find a shallow container. Any kind that doesn’t have drainage. Yes, this is one time you don’t need a drainage hole in the pot. It can be decorative or you can even decorate an empty tuna can.

*You will need either: marbles, pea gravel, or any kind of decorative rock. You don’t even need soil. Put your choice in the bottom of the container first, then lightly press the bulbs into it. Make sure the pointy part of the bulb is facing up. Then fill more of your medium around the bulbs just to hold the bulb firmly in place. The tip of the bulb should be peeking out a little.

*Water to the base of the bulbs. Do not let the water level get lower than this until the roots start growing.

How do you know? You’ll see new growth coming out of the bulb.

*Place in a bright filtered window and watch it grow.

Note: You can put as many bulbs as will fit in your container.



Forcing Bulbs for Winter Color

If you would like color in your home during the long cold winter months. Try forcing flowering bulbs. Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, crocus and more can all be forced to bloom indoors. You can purchase bulbs that are called “Easy to Force” or “Forcible” on-line or from your local garden shop. Sometimes you can find them on sale at the end of the outdoor

planting season. If you didn’t have time to plant all your bulbs outside, this is a way to save them. They won’t be any good if you wait until spring. They must have a cooling period. You can also stagger the planting times so you have some blooming the entire winter. If you plant the bulbs in November, they should be ready by January. There are a couple different ways you can force bulbs. You can pot them up and put them in the refrigerator for 14-20 weeks of winter or you can make a place for your pots outside with straw bales. They will need protection from freezing temperatures. They would also need to be in a place where you could pull them out easily to enjoy them. One way that I have used, is to put them in a small box (not planted) in the back of my frig. Then when my planters outside start to thaw out in the early spring, I dig up the soil enough so I can plant my bulbs right out in them. They come up early and I have flowers before anyone else can plant their annuals outside. When they are done flowering I pull them out and plant my annuals when I know we no longer have a chance of frost. See how to force on page 3.

What could be more fun in winter than to watch a spring garden blooming in your home?

How to Force your Bulbs

Here's what you'll need for your spring in the winter: Bulbs, containers, soil and like I said before a cool area.

- **Containers**– Any type of container will work as long as it has drainage holes in it and you have a place to put it in cold storage for 12-20 weeks. Use ones that work best with your décor. Try something fun, like coffee cans, and old boot. A shallow container or bulb pans work very well.
- **Soil**– Use a good potting mix with some worm casting added for a natural nutrient boost when the bulbs need it.
- **Planting**– Fill the pots partially with soil. Lay the bulbs on top of the soil, point side up. Place the bulbs as close as you can get them in the pots. Note: Tulips should be planted with the flat sides facing the pot. That way the leaves will be on the outside and the flow-

ers in the middle. Then pack more soil around the bulbs so that just the tips are showing.

- **Water and label pots**– Water the containers thoroughly either slowly from the top or set it in a pan of water so that the soil soaks up the water. Label the pots if you planted specific colors for certain areas of your home.
- **Cold storage** - You now need to put the pots in a period of cold storage. Temperatures should be in the 35-50 degree range. The bulbs need at least 10 to 15 weeks depending on the bulbs. Note: Do not put bulbs in the frig. with onions or any fruit especially apples. They give off ethylene gas which sterilizes the



**Winter outside
Spring inside**

bulbs so they don't bloom.

- **Flowering**– After the bulbs have been in the frig. for the correct amount of time, bring them out. Put them in a cool (60*) dark spot for about a week or until you see some growth. Then put into a warm bright spot. If they need water give them some it this time.
- **After Flowering**– Keep the plant growing, cut the flower stalk of and let the leaves die down naturally. You can plant them outside either in the spring or wait until fall. It really takes a lot out of them when they are forced. Personally I would just throw them out. It will take them a long time to recover after planting outside.

Bulb Chart for Forcing

Type	Weeks for Chilling	Weeks to Bloom
<u>Hyacinths-</u>	<u>11-14</u>	<u>2-3</u>
<u>Tulips-</u>	<u>14-20</u>	<u>2-3</u>
<u>Daffodils-</u>	<u>15-17</u>	<u>2-3</u>
<u>Crocus-</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>2-3</u>
<u>Iris-</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>2-3</u>
<u>Muscari- (Grape Hyacinths)</u>	<u>13-15</u>	<u>2-3</u>

About Christmas Cactus— *Schlumbergera bridgesii*

Christmas Cactus are not a true cactus. They are epiphytes like Orchids and Bromeliads. This means they grow in tropical and sub-tropical rain forests and attach their roots to a host plant, it does not live in the hot desert. European plant explorers discovered them growing in cracks of rocks and perched high on tree branches. They were first sold in London in the mid-1800's. Many people still have off-shoots of their great-grandmothers plants. Today there are many different hybridized cultivars with very pointy leaves. True old fashion Christmas cactus have smooth rounded leaves. We can also call them Holiday cactus because you can purchase them for just about any holiday: Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, Kwanzaa or even Hanukkah. There isn't any religious symbolism associated with them. They bloom when the days start getting shorter and the nights longer. To learn more go to: pattysplants.com for a sheet on care and how to get them to rebloom.



**Christmas Cactus
are tropical not a
desert cactus**

About The Poinsettia—*Euphorbia pulcherrima*

The poinsettia was brought to our country by the first US Ambassador, Joel Robert Poinsette. He discovered them in Mexico in 1825. They have many titles such as, The Mexican Wildflower, Flower of the Holy Night in Central America, Christmas Star in the Netherlands, Flor De Nochebueno which means Flower of the Christmas Eve. In their native land they grow 12 feet and grow wild over the hill sides.

Poinsettias are one of the most dramatic and elegant holiday plants. Most people think the colored leaves are the flowers but if you look closely in the center of the plant you'll see tiny buds. These buds will open to small yellow flowers. When looking for a healthy plant, look for their buds to be closed and their leaves to be perky. Make sure they are not losing bottom leaves. Also make sure if you live in the mid-west, you never take them outside without a plant sleeve or bag over them to protect them from the cold.

Let me also tell you Poinsettias are not poisonous. I had many costumers tell me they couldn't purchase them because they are poisonous and have children or pets. That's probably what half the country believes still today and for the last 75 years. But studies conducted by The Ohio State University in cooperation with the Society of American Florists concluded that no toxicity is evident. In fact, the POISINDEX Information Service, the primary information resource used by most poison control centers, states that a 50 lb. child would have to ingest over 500 poinsettia leaves to even have any serious health issues. You can still use caution with them as with any plant or flower around children and pets. My mothers cat "Spooky" is 19 years old and unfortunately for my mom Spooky has been eating her poinsettia plants for years. Sad to say that once beautiful poinsettia by the end of the season has nothing but stems with holey torn leaves. "Spooky" the cat has made it through another triumphant season!

www.pattysplants.com or email: patty@pattysplants.com

**Poinsettias are not
poisonous!**

Poinsettia Care

- **Light:** Place plant in 5-6 hours of bright indirect sun.
- **Temperature:** The temperature in your home should be 68-70*. Remember they are native to Mexico so they do like it warmer. Poinsettias don't like cold drafts or to be put by heat vents and fireplaces.
- **Water:** Water the plant when the soil feels slightly dry. They do not like wet feet, so if you bought it in a fancy foil wrap please poke holes in the bottom.

Loosing yellow leaves could be a sign of over-watering.

- **Fertilize:** You don't need to fertilize while the plant is blooming. The tiny flowers are on the top of the plant. The leaves are the colorful bracts that changed after they received the right amount of lightness and darkness for 8-10 weeks.



Poke holes in the foil wrap for drainage.

Important Tip When Purchasing Plants in Winter

Since plants don't like cold, you must never take them outside in the winter without some kind of protection. Use the plant sleeve they came in to take them to their final destination. Or a couple of garage bags will help. Also warm up the car. If the shop your at doesn't offer you a bag, ask for one. Plants don't have body heat. The cover only helps to keep the wind and chill off temporarily. Please don't leave them in the car in the winter even with the protective covering on unless you have the heat on. Leaving your plants to do more shopping

will surely damage or kill them once the temperature in the car dips. This can happen in less than 5 minutes when it's freezing out here in the mid-west. When you get them home take off the cover as soon as possible to prevent any more stress to your plants.

Indoor Plants need protection from outdoor winter weather.

Poisonous & Non Poisonous Holiday Plants

Considered Safe

Norfolk Island Pine
Christmas Cactus
Pine trees (Scotch, Norway & White)
Fir trees (Balsam, Fraser, Noble)

Use Caution

Paperwhites-the bulbs are mildly toxic if eaten.
Poinsettias- the milky sap can cause skin irritation.
Ferns- (not Boston type), can cause skin irritation & nausea.
English Ivies-Mild enough to be around children

Poisonous

Mistletoe- all parts; leaves, berries & stems
Amaryllis- bulbs if eaten
Azalea-all parts; leaves, flowers & stems
Junipers- the needles are toxic
Holly- all parts: leaves, the berries are very toxic
Jerusalem Cherry- the fruits can cause serious problems if eaten. Keep away from children and pets. (They look like cherry tomatoes)

Patty's Plants

Watch for my January Newsletter on:

“Planning The Outdoor Herb Garden”

With articles on:

Growing Tips
Pruning Herbs
Controlling Pests and Diseases
Using fresh Herbs
Harvesting and Drying
Storage
Freezing
And more...

Amaryllis are truly the most beautiful and exotic looking flowers to brighten your home in the winter. They are native to the tropical regions of South America.

When purchasing a new Amaryllis bulb, they are one of the easiest bulbs to grow. However last years bulbs take a little more care. Find more information on care and how the Amaryllis got it's name go to:



www.pattysplants.com



Patty's Plants

Holiday Ornaments Made Naturally

Cinnamon and Applesauce Dough Ornaments

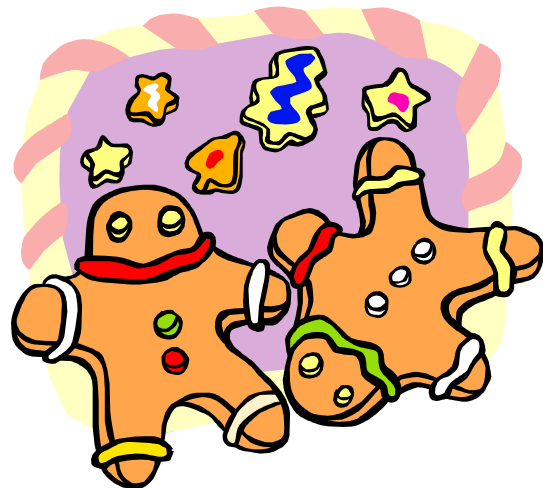
1 cup applesauce

1 cup cinnamon

Stir together until you have the right consistency. Adjust it if the dough is too dry or too sticky. Roll out dough onto a floured board to a 1/8 inch thickness. Cut into any shapes you wish. Poke a hole at the top of the shape with a straw or chopstick. Place the cutouts carefully on a cookie tray or baking sheet. Bake for 2 hours on 200 degrees until they are hard. Or let them air dry. Place them on a waxed-papered tray and let dry for one day. Change the wax paper after the first day and continue to dry until they are hard. Use colorful ribbon to put through the hole to hang.

These are very fragrant, they smell wonderful but I must say they are not edible the taste is horrible.

You can find cinnamon in bulk at your local co-op or health food store. It will be less expensive.



A fun Project for all ages!