

Wally's Weekly News 16th MAY 2009
Written by Wally Richards.

CONTAINER PLANTS

With winter, now is an ideal time to do some container gardening for both indoors and outside.

The chill and dreariness of the days ahead can be broken by planting colour (flowers) into containers which can lift the spirits on the gloomiest day.

Starting with the indoors a call down to your local garden centre will find a number of house plants to brighten up your home.

There are ample cyclamen available at this time, being a winter flowering plant.

The miniature types often have a lovely fragrance as well as their delightful up standing flowers.

Cyclamen prefer a cool or colder situation with as much direct sunlight as possible.

This makes them excellent specimens for windowsills indoors and for colour around entrance ways.

Many gardeners find they have more success with these plants outside than they do indoors.

The reason for this is that it is colder outside and there will be a certain amount of air movement to keep them happy even if they become too wet from rain or watering.

Indoors, the temperature is greater once the room they are in is heated and if they are over watered this can be fatal as rots will form on the leaves and flower stems. In bad cases the bulb will also rot away.

Cyclamen are not a flowering plant that you can safely place on a coffee table in the middle of the room except for short periods of time. Away from the windowsill or outdoors, the leaves and flowers will start to stretch towards the distant light and the plant will become unbalanced. The stretching will weaken the plant and be much more susceptible to over watering diseases.

For indoors the plants should sit on a windowsill where they will receive as much natural light as possible and next to the cold pane of glass, (if you do not have double glazing) will be better suited to its needs of both temperature and light.

When you draw the curtains at night then the cyclamen should be behind the curtain where it is going to be a lot colder than in the heated room.

Every few days you should rotate the pot 180 degrees so that each side of the plant receives direct light for a few days before being turned again.

This will greatly help to keep the plant balanced rather than have all its foliage and flowers growing towards the window side of the container.

Watering can is a problem for many as there is often a tendency to over water.

That is fatal especially in a room that is heated and has little air movement.

The easy answer to this is to check your cyclamen every day when you open and close the curtains, if the flower stems are starting to droop then give the plant a small drink of cold water.

(As the potting mix dries out the flowers will be the first to droop followed by the foliage.)

Dependant on the size of the pot and plant this would be about 200 to 500 mls of water.

This should be applied right around the circumference of the pot avoiding watering over

the bulb.

If you find that when you water the plant much of the water runs out into the saucer then there is a problem in so much as the mix has become too dry and will not accept much of the water.

To overcome this, you fill a bucket with water and plunge the pot into it so that the top of the container is submerged. Air bubbles will start bubbling up and the pot should be held under water till there is no more bubbles. Lift up and allow to drain, taking the surplus water away.

The mix is now saturated with water and the best thing to do is to place the pot outside on a porch for a couple of days to allow the container to dry out a bit in the cold.

While outside it should be in a spot where it is sheltered from the worst of the wind and protected from frosts.

After a few days you can bring your cyclamen back inside to the windowsill.

At any time that a cyclamen is looking a bit poorly then simply pop it outside for about a week to refresh it.

Being a flowering plant they do appreciate some feeding and any good liquid plant food is ideal to add to your water once or twice a month. **Matrix Reloaded** is an excellent container plant food as it contains all the minerals for growing plants in a hydroponics system.

When the cyclamen has finished flowering later in the year then you can place the plant outdoors in its pot or plant it in a shaded situation under trees or shrubs. Do not have them in full summer sun light.

Outdoors the cyclamen will likely produce seed pods as the pollination of the flowers is breeze assisted.

You can leave these seed pods on the plants until they are fully ripe and then harvest the fresh seeds.

Cyclamen seed are usually germinated in the winter by keeping the seeds moist as they are sitting on top of the growing medium, only partially covered or bare. They germinate best in the dark with some underheat.

Once the first leaves appear then move the seed tray into a bright light situation and allow the medium to dry out a bit before re-watering. Later about Xmas time the baby plants will be of reasonable size to pot individually into small 50mm pots. By feeding the mentioned plant food they will then quickly grow and their root system will fill the small pot.

They then can be transferred to a larger container say about 120mm size.

When this pot is filled then up to a larger one again say about 200mm or bigger.

With ample food you can grow a massive cyclamen with hundreds of flowers for the following winter.

If grown for indoor use do not repot into a container that is too big for your windowsills. Likely you may have a number of other pot plants growing in your home. Great care should be taken in winter not too over water, in fact the mix should be kept a little on the dry side till they start to come away again in the spring.

There are ample types of flowering plants called colour spots that you will find at your garden centre.

These can be potted up in compost for colour outdoors or some are suitable in potting mix for indoors on windowsills or very close to sunny windows.

Outside now is the time to spray frost sensitive plants with **Vaporgard** to give them down to minus 3 degree frost protection for the next 3 months. This works a treat but if there are two or more frosts in a row, night after night, then additional protection such as frost cloth will be needed as the plants do not have time to recover before they are frosted again. **Vaporgard** is perfect for the occasional frost every few days or more apart. Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)
Email wallyjr@gardenews.co.nz