

## HOLIDAY FLOWER

Petunia likes to give the people in her office flowers at Christmas. After several major goofs, she sat down with her favorite florist for tips on more lasting floral gifts. Here are her tips.

No matter what potted plant you purchase, never let it get cold! Have it at least double bagged, triple if possible. That pretty pot cover can kill your plant. It's waterproof so every time you water, the excess stays in that cover. Eventually, the pond in the bottom of the cover will kill the roots of the plant. An easy fix- cut a drain hole in the cover before you give it if you know the person getting the plant has a bit of a brown thumb.

Poinsettias are a favorite plant gift. They come in many colors, and they are cheap! If they aren't red, pink or white, they have been sprayed with a plant-based paint. Whatever color, they last forever. Eventually, the colored leaves (the flower is that funny thing in the middle) will drop off leaving a green plant. If you are desperate for greenery in your house, that's fine but it's OK to set it on the deck for the birds if you get tired of it. The flower police won't come after you. Some people hang on to their poinsettias thinking that it will re-bloom. It's not likely. They need special conditions that the normal homeowner can't replicate. Dump it! or put it in the flower garden next spring for filler.

Many of the other flowering plants available now will rebloom if given proper care. Poke that hole in the cover before you hand it over just in case your friend isn't aware of how deadly it can be.

If your plant doesn't come with directions, here are a few universal ones. Keep it out of cold drafts. Don't put it next to a cold window. Most of them need full sun. you can use it as a centerpiece but put it back in a sunny space as soon as you can. Do not overwater. Stick your finger in the soil up to the first joint. If the tip of your finger feels damp, hold the water. Some flowering plants can be convinced to bloom again. Set them out in summer with your other house plants and you may be rewarded with a new flush of blooms. Just not poinsettias.

If you get a gift of live flowers, you want them to last as long as possible. If it is a mixed bouquet, pull out the asparagus fern. In 2 days, all that will be left of it are bare branches and a drift of tiny green 'dust' that gets in everything. Pull out any roses. Those long, long stems look so elegant. Think a minute, the flower has to pull water the full length of that stem to stay pretty. Cut them short and they will last much longer. You can even float them in a bowl. Pull the dying petals off the outside of the flower to lengthen their life a bit longer.

If you have a cat, give any lilies to a friend. Just a nibble of any part of that flower can kill your cat. Usually there isn't a lot of greenery in a mixed bouquet. To make yours look more luxuriant, buy an extra bunch of greenery. That way, as the flowers die, you can divide up the rest into smaller bouquets. Remove flowers as they look tired. Just cutting the stems shorter may bring them back to life. Here's to a floriferous holiday.

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