

Cyclamen - *A Texas Winter Delight*

Let's face it, we have precious few choices for color when fall and winter roll around in our 'climatic' State. But one plant that can fit well into the landscape or containers would be the venerable cyclamen. Having traditionally been reserved for florists, cyclamen can be a hardy plant used outside the floral realm. Generally sold during the Christmas season, Cyclamen will actually start blooming during mid to late October right on through the winter season with proper care.



Cyclamen belong to the family of Primulaceae, or the primrose family and the genus contains about 20 species. Although they are in the primrose family, they are tuberous plants. (A tuber is a short, thick, usually but not always subterranean stem or branch bearing buds or "eyes" and serving as a storage organ.) When starting cyclamen from seed, they will take about two years to produce blooms. Starting from tubers will provide more success for propagation purposes.

Since cyclamen prefer cool daytime temperatures of 60-65°F and night temperatures of 50°, most parts of Texas can accommodate this penchant. The plants favor slightly alkaline soil, however they will do fine in regardless of Ph as long as it's well-drained. A good potting mix for cyclamens consists of humus, sand and some bone meal added to your regular potting mix.

Early forms had small flowers of relatively pale color. British breeders first developed more intense petal color and broader, flatter corolla lobes. Double-sized flowers were noted in England and Germany by 1870 (Doorenbos, 1950). Both diploid and polyploid cultivars are currently on the market. Large, intermediate and small, as well as common, fringed, crested, frilled, and double-flowered forms, are now available in many colors. Blooms come in a variety of holiday colors: red, white, pink or lavender that hang upside down over the heart-shaped gray-green foliage. Uniformity of cultivars is less than desired. Recently introduced F-1 hybrids are much more uniform, although not as much so as F-1 hybrids of many other plant species.

Plant cyclamens with the upper half of the tuber at or just below the soil surface. Cyclamen tubers are very sensitive to over watering which can result in crown or leaf rot. Cyclamens can be sensitive to a rapid frost, however they can survive to 10° if somewhat sheltered. Cyclamen mites can be a problem, in which case isolate the plants and drench with miticide.