



A Half-Dozen Holiday Houseplants

***Araucaria heterophylla* – Norfolk Island Pine**

Although the Norfolk Island Pine is often sold during the holidays, it is not a true pine but a tropical native from a small island in the South Pacific. While it can reach up to 200 feet in the wild, as a slow-growing houseplant it will usually reach a maximum of 5 or 6 feet, developing a woody trunk and sturdy branches.

Light: Bright, indirect light to some sun Temperature: Low to average: 60° - 75°
Moisture: Consistently moist; drier in winter Fertilization: Once every two weeks at ½ strength from spring
Humidity: Moderate room humidity; likes misting through fall only; nothing in winter
Notes: Likes a summer vacation outside, protect from hot afternoon sun; never prune the growing tips as there will be no new growth, brown tips or dead branches may be pruned; rotate regularly for symmetrical form; fragile root system resents transplanting; repot only when it becomes root-bound; dry air causes leaf drop; yellowing indicates root rot

***Cupressus macrocarpa* ‘Goldcrest’ – Lemon Cypress**

Lemon-scented in summer, glowing brightly with a delicate inner light, this conifer is often trained as a topiary for indoor display. It tends to grow in spurts, takes well to pruning, and makes a bright, feathery background for other houseplants.

Light: Bright, indirect light to full sun Temperature: Low: 55° - 65° must be above 55°
Moisture: Consistently moist Fertilization: Once a year in spring
Humidity: Average room humidity; likes misting
Notes: Monitor watering vigilantly - rarely recovers from completely drying out; water more sparingly in winter; clip gently in spring to help maintain its natural shape; temporary browning on pruned tips will fade as plant grows; susceptible to aphids so check regularly; transition gradually when moving to an outdoor site in full sun

***Cyclamen persicum* – Florist’s Cyclamen**

This Mediterranean/Middle East native is a plant that naturally blooms all winter. The abundant, swept-back flowers are accented by intricately patterned foliage which varies from plant to plant. Although often abandoned once it goes into dormancy, it is entirely possible to welcome your cyclamen back for another season of blooming.

Light: Bright, indirect light; some winter sun Temperature: Cool: 60° - 65° day; 55° - 60° nighttime
Moisture: Let dry somewhat before watering Fertilization: Once a month at ½ strength from fall through
Humidity: Moderate humidity; avoid hot, dry air spring only; nothing during dormancy
Notes: Deadhead regularly to promote flowering; temperatures over 68° will induce dormancy, find cool spots indoors during bloom-time; avoid watering crown by setting in tepid water for 15 minutes; limp leaves indicate plant is too dry, submerge briefly but completely to rehydrate; yellow, floppy leaves indicate over-watering; dormancy begins in April or May; stop fertilizing and taper off watering to zero and place in dark, cool spot; return to bright, indirect light in August or September; gradually resume watering and fertilizing when growth appears; tubers somewhat toxic when ingested

***Hedera helix* – Ivy Topiaries and Accents**

Ivy trained onto a topiary form makes a decorative addition to holiday centerpieces and may be accented with cyclamen, Poinsettias and other flowers in floral tubes. Topiaries are also easy to create – make two and give one away!

Light: Bright, indirect light; no direct sun

Temperature: Cool to average: 50°- 70°

Moisture: Consistently moist; drier in winter

Fertilization: Once a month with high-nitrogen fertilizer from

Humidity: Needs high humidity; likes misting

spring through fall only; nothing in winter

Notes: Vigorous, maintain shape by regularly tucking and wrapping tendrils into topiary form; protect from drafts and heating vents; appreciates an occasional full-plant, lukewarm shower to clean foliage and increase humidity; watch for spider mites which thrive in dry environments; leaves are toxic when ingested and a skin irritant

***Schlumbergera truncata*, *Schlumbergera x buckleyi* – Thanksgiving Cactus, Christmas Cactus**

Although Poinsettias are considered the classic holiday plant, these forest cacti deserve the same status since they naturally bloom from late fall into winter. With a bit of care and discipline they can be induced to bloom every year.

Light: Bright, indirect light; no direct sun

Temperature: Varies: 55°- 70° indoors; 70°- 80° outdoors

Moisture: Let dry somewhat before watering

Fertilization: Cactus fertilizer; once a month from April

Humidity: Moderate humidity

to September only; nothing in fall and winter

Notes: Epiphytic forest cactus; will twist toward light, sometimes causing bud or bloom drop; rotate often to keep even; mushy stems indicate over-watering; likes a wide, shallow pot; keep rootbound; propagate with cuttings or by dividing

Reblooming is triggered by a combination of shortening day length and cooling temperatures:

- After flowering is done, provide a resting period from end of January to April 1st, keep at 55° and water very sparingly
- From April to June 1st provide regular houseplant care, keeping evenly moist and beginning regular fertilization
- Around June 1st take your plant outside and place in a shady, cool area; pinch back tips to promote branching
- Continue regular care until mid-September when outdoor night-time temperatures are around 50°- 60°
- At this point, bring it back inside, keep in a cool bright place, stop fertilizing and let dry somewhat before watering
- This pre-flowering period is the **tricky part**: your plant will need 6-8 weeks of at 12-14 hours of continuous darkness each night to set buds and begin flowering; artificial light counts – use a box, paper bag or closet to enforce darkness
- Maintain temperatures between 50°- 55° at night while you are waiting for flowering to begin
- During the day, temperatures should be around 68° and your plant should be kept in a spot with bright, indirect light
- When buds and flowers appear, it can be left in its bright, cool location and regular watering can resume

***Solanum pseudocapsicum* – Jerusalem Cherry**

Starry white flowers are followed by ornamental, round fruits which turn from green to yellow to orange to red. This long-lasting display makes it a favorite decorative indoor plant, but it is just as happy out on the patio in the summer.

Light: Bright, indirect light to direct sun

Temperature: Low to average: 60°- 75°

Moisture: Consistently moist; drier in spring

Fertilization: Tomato fertilizer; once a month from spring

Humidity: Moderate humidity; likes misting

through fall only; nothing in winter

Notes: Protect from drafts and heating vents; allow a resting period starting in late winter – cut back stems by one half, reduce watering and place in a cool (60°) spot; in May move to a sunny window or outdoors and resume regular care; can take summer heat outdoors but won't tolerate frost; watch for aphids, whiteflies and spider mites; regular misting or hosing down will prevent spider mite infestations; fruit is poisonous to humans and pets and should NOT be eaten!