TRIO OF HOLIDAY HOUSEPLANTS?
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Thanksgiving….The table was set. The turkey smelled great. The house was clean enough. The Christmas cactus in the foyer, however, had dropped all of its blossoms. The phaleonopsis orchid had just faded while the dendrobium refused to open. Someone moved my gorgeous cyclamen off the counter to make way for food. In case this sounds traumatic to you, I thought I would share a few things I have learned about some of my favorite houseplants that are in bloom at this time of the year, and hopefully, yours will be in bloom for Christmas.

First of all, do not talk on the phone while you are tending your Christmas cactus. Pay attention! It is of utmost importance that you do not alter the plant’s orientation to the sun. Blossoms will follow the sun. If you turn the plants once the buds have started to grow, they will snap off. A display of fallen buds on the coffee table is far less impressive than a Christmas cactus in full bloom. Also, clay pots work well for this plant. When you water, soak the pot well, let it drain completely, and replace it exactly as you found it.

Like the Christmas cactus, orchids are impressive, but not easy. A seasoned orchid grower taught me a few things that are really helpful in growing orchids. First, do not overwater or overfeed orchids. Rather than using a calendar to dictate when to feed them, go by what the plant tells you. When it starts to grow, give it a diluted orchid fertilizer for growth. When it starts to put out a bloom, switch to a fertilizer for orchid blooms. Use a light hand. If you are not fertilizing enough, the plant will tell you. It will remove nitrogen from the oldest leaves to send to new growth. The oldest leaves will yellow and that is a sign to feed it a bit more. Also, orchids, under no circumstances, can have standing water in their pots. Use an orchid potting mix and water them by soaking and fully draining them. Once the pots are fully drained, add water to a pebble tray below them. They really insist on humidity to thrive. Otherwise, they will just exist, but never perform. If you can mist them daily, they will thank you. They like bright, indirect light. An eastern windowsill or a room with southern exposure- but away from direct light- works well. Lastly, they really like to be outside in the shade for the summer. The summer humidity will encourage blooming.
Regarding cyclamen, make sure that the rounded shoulders of the corm are above the soil line. If not, the corm will rot. Cyclamen like bright light but they dry quickly so you must keep a close eye. Water lightly and often- but only as the plant indicates- when the soil is dry to the touch. Remove all spent flowers so they keep blooming rather than setting seed. When they are tired of blooming, back off on the fertilizer and water and let them rest. They will lose leaves and look sparse over the summer. When they are ready, they will resume growth and bloom once more.

This Christmas, I hope your house is clean enough, your spiral ham is delicious, and that no one moves your cyclamen. More importantly, I hope that your houseplants are in full bloom. I wouldn’t remember the ham but a good looking Christmas cactus is hard to forget.

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