

Beautiful Holiday Plants

The holiday season is upon us, cooler temperatures have finally arrived, and most landscapes have begun to fade. Summer and fall-blooming ornamentals are heading into dormancy, with only a few still showing their true colors. Roses, camellias, and shade trees are a few of those to notice. With this in mind, many nurseries and garden centers carry plants during the holiday season that can also be given as gifts and even used for decoration.

A few of the ornamentals that can be used are camellia, holly, magnolia, boxwood, yew, and spruce. Two camellias that bloom during the holiday season are *Camellia sasanqua* 'Yuletide' and 'Shi-Shi Gashira'. Yuletide has small, dark-green foliage with 2-inch wide flowers that are dark red with yellow centers. This plant will grow to make a nice, compact five foot shrub. Shi-Shi Gashira has pure white blooms that are 4 inches across with dark green leaves for a backdrop.

Many hollies are also used for decoration because of their dark green foliage and beautiful red or orange berries. 'Nellie R. Stevens' Holly is my first choice due to its long stems with many berries. Dwarf Burford, Yaupon, and Mary Nell hollies also may be used. Boxwood, yew and hemlock are mostly used to make wreaths, while pine, spruce and fir may be used as indoor Christmas trees. Speaking of Christmas trees, leave that old man-made tree in the attic. Go to your local tree grower and select a beautiful, high-quality fresh cut tree. It will be beautiful and will help support a local grower.

There are also many wonderful houseplants that may be used for holiday decorations. A few of the most popular are Poinsettias, Cactus and Norfolk Island Pine. Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) come in numerous colors ranging from red to pink to white to marble. These plants may last well into the springtime if given proper care. You can even plant these in your landscape after the last frost has passed.

Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncate*) usually blooms from Thanksgiving through Christmas, with colors ranging from red to lavender to white to salmon-orange. Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) blooms from Christmas through March, with colors usually being red or white. Norfolk Island Pines (*Araucaria heterophylla*) are sold as small living Christmas trees and help provide greenery during the holiday season. A few other holiday houseplant options are Jerusalem Cherry, Cyclamen, Kalanchoe and Rosemary. These smaller plants make wonderful table-top decorations.

Most indoor plants die from being over-watered, so water only enough to keep the soil moist. One easy method is to check the soil moisture with your finger. If it is moist to the second knuckle, it does not need water. A good-quality soil-moisture meter also works. The soil will need to be light and also provide adequate drainage. Indoor plants do not like drastic temperature changes or being moved frequently, so keep plants clear of vents and heaters and do not move unless necessary. Hopefully these tips will help you to have a successful and enjoyable holiday season!

If you have any questions, please contact your local county Extension office at (662) 328-2111 or visit our website at <http://msucare.com>.

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