

## Cyclamen

'Florist's Cyclamen' or 'Shooting Stars', as they are otherwise known, are virtually unique among house plants because they originate in very cold areas.

More specifically, they come from alpine woodlands in Palestine, Asia Minor and the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Another unusual feature is that they have a tuber just below the foliage. Like many spring flowering bulbs, cyclamen can live off this store of food through periods of dormancy.

Cyclamen are particularly valuable house plants because they flower through winter when most tropical indoor plants are going to sleep. And the flowers are gorgeous. They are suspended above the foliage on slender stems and the petals, of which there are usually five, curve back to resemble a tulip. The flowers may be pure white, deep red, or various shades of purple, mauve, salmon, or pink. Some have a thin white edge to the petal and some have stripes.

Others come with ruffled petals and the 'miniatures' even have a sweet perfume, a common feature of wild cyclamen. These miniatures have tiny flowers but the leaves and the plant itself are a standard size. These miniatures have tiny flowers but the leaves and the plant itself are a standard size.

### HOW TO CARE FOR CYCLAMEN

Keep cyclamen cool at all times. They are at home in the coldest room in the house. It's actually a great idea to put them outside in the cold at night just before going to bed. Then bring them back in next evening to enjoy the flower show.

If you want to leave cyclamen indoors through the flowering season then you will need to lift the level of humidity to compensate for a lack of chill. One way of lifting humidity is to plunge the potted cyclamen into a larger, outer pot that is half filled with moist peat moss.

Cyclamen need perfect drainage yet they resent getting the top of the tuber saturated, it can lead to a rot developing. The best way to water them is from below, either by placing on a saucer of water or by dunking the plant into a bucket.

Liquid fertilisers applied every fortnight will supply a flowering cyclamen with all the nutrient it needs. Thrive and Thrive Flower & Fruit are recommended.

To encourage continuous flowering remove any 'spent' or finished blooms by twisting the stalk and pulling sharply, so that it comes away cleanly from the tuber. Also remove any yellow leaves in this way.

When flowering finishes in the spring it's recommended that you discard the plant. Some folks find this difficult to do. If you wish to get this 'living bunch of flowers' to come back to life again, find an outside shady spot, tip the pot on its side, then wait for signs of regrowth in early autumn. At this point repot into fresh soil and commence regular liquid feeding. It should come back into flower and delight you for another winter.