

Recycling a Cyclamen

Houseplants that bloom during the gray days of winter are treasured by gardeners everywhere. Many of us especially prize the florists', or Persian, cyclamen (*C. persicum*) for its large white, pink, or rose blossoms and its silver-and-green marbled foliage. This tuberous plant's elegant beauty is enough incentive to prompt us to carry it through dormancy and persuade it to bloom again next winter. If you attend to its needs, it will reward you by increasing in size and flower production each year.

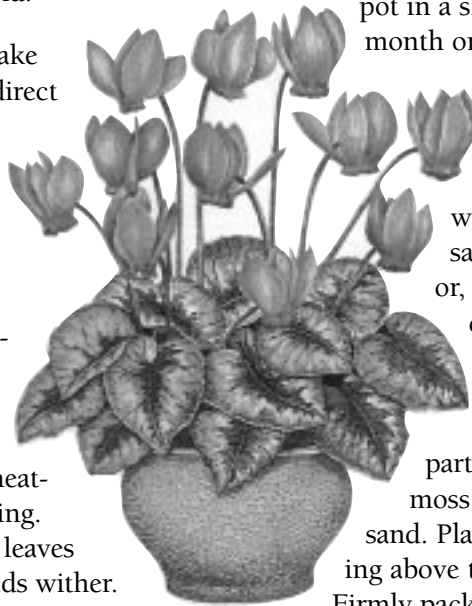
Start with a healthy, well-grown specimen that has plenty of buds hidden among the foliage. Avoid plants with yellow or dead leaves, which are signs of heat or moisture stress, and check carefully for insects. For the trip home, place your new purchase in a plant sleeve or shopping bag to protect it from the cold.

1 PLACE IN A SUITABLE SPOT: Make sure your plant receives bright, indirect light during the day. The flowers will last longer if they are not exposed to direct sunlight. Cyclamens also prefer cool daytime temperatures, ideally no more than 65 degrees Fahrenheit. This quality makes them good winter houseplants, assuming you are conservative with the thermostat. They appreciate it even cooler at night, from 40 to 50 degrees, so it may be necessary to move the plant to an unheated room or cool entryway in the evening. Your plant is getting overheated if the leaves turn yellow quickly and the flower buds wither.

2 CARE: While your cyclamen is growing and blooming, keep the soil moist but not soggy, watering as soon as the soil surface feels dry. To prevent the tuber from rotting, water gently along the sides of the pot, or water from below, leaving the plant in a saucer of water for about half an hour until the moisture rises to the surface, drain excess water from the saucer. Every two or three weeks feed the plant with a liquid houseplant fertilizer such as 10-15-10.

Sometimes cyclamens are attacked by aphids: small, plump, usually green insects that distort the plant's growth as they suck out its juices. Cyclamen mites are harder to spot because they are tiny and almost transparent, but their damage is easy to recognize: malformed flowers and foliage that is curled into purple, wrinkled cups. Should these pests appear, isolate the plant and treat it with an insecticidal soap.

3 LET THE PLANT GO DORMANT: By March or early April your cyclamen will stop blooming and producing new growth, and the leaves will turn yellow. The plant is entering a natural and necessary dormant period that will last most of the summer. Cut back on water, giving it only enough to keep the soil from becoming bone-dry – about every two weeks. Place the pot in a shady, out-of-the-way place for the next month or so and let the foliage gradually die.



4 REPOT: In early August remove the dormant tuber from its pot. Cyclamens bloom more profusely when pot-bound, so replant yours in the same size pot for at least one more year, or, if the tuber has filled the pot, select a container that is an inch or two larger. Cut off any roots clinging to the tuber and rub off as much soil as possible. Prepare a mixture of two parts sterile potting soil, one part peat moss, and one part perlite or sharp builders' sand. Place the tuber with the top half protruding above the soil to protect it from rotting. Firmly pack the soil mix around it.

Water well and place the pot outdoors in the shade. New shoots should appear soon. Water weekly, or more frequently if the weather is hot. Bring the plant indoors well before the first frost and begin fertilizing as before. A glorious display of flowers should appear early in the new year.