

Flowers, Plants and Things

Cool Temperature Plants

by

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Now is the time to enjoy, at home, those brilliant plants that like cool temperatures. Some of our most brightly colored flowering plants like really cool temperatures such as we have in our homes from January through April. As we turn our thermostats down because of high heating costs and the economy, these plants will give warmth and beauty to any home. These plants have been mainstay winter plants throughout Europe for years because most homes are heated to 60 or 65 degrees.

Certainly we've enjoyed our cyclamen all winter long. Those recently purchased will continue to flower as long as they're kept cool. High temperatures will stop flower's bud initiation, cause the leaves to get long and spindly and then die. When the plant has lost its life and gone dormant, dry it off, place in a cool dry basement and forget it until August. Then bring it up, water and get it going again. Chances are very good that you'll have a nice flowering plant again by February.

But other than cyclamen, two of my favorite cool plants are the cineraria and the calceolaria. You'll recognize the first because of its brilliant clusters of daisy-like flowers in bold purples and pinks, reds and magenta. It often is splotted with white toward the center of the flower. Mostly available at stores such as Lowe's and Wegman's, they'll be appearing in the next couple of weeks. As you select yours, check to be sure that they are insect free; white flies favor this plant and that the leaves are dark green and firm. Remember, too, that this is a one time plant. When it has finished blooming, toss it. Your investment of a few dollars was for brightness and beauty for a few weeks. The cineraria will do just that.

Calceolaria is commonly known as the pocket book plant, purse plant or slipper flower because of its pouch shaped flowers. Originally from Chile hybridizers have given us a

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magnificent range of colors, leaning to the oranges and reds and yellows, many of them dotted with darker colors.

Keep Calceolarias and Cinerarias where you can enjoy them during the day, but remember, they'll not only withstand but thoroughly enjoy 50-60 degrees F. Both of these plants like bright filtered sunlight. (Avoid putting them in direct sunlight). Neither needs fertilizer while you have it. They do differ with water. While the calceolaria likes to dry out a bit between watering, the cinerarias like to be kept evenly moist.

Remember though, these plants are like tender annuals. When they're finished blooming, toss them. They're not worth keeping for a second season. They give lots of color, at a low price in a cool room for seven weeks. We think they're worth having.

Another great plant to consider is the Cymbidium orchid. For years we have seen the Phalaenopsis, Moth Orchid, in stores, a plant that requires higher temperatures to bloom. Now we are seeing the first Cymbidiums coming into the market place. A great plant, it requires very cool temperatures to set bud, a cool room in our December and January homes, followed by a little warmer in February and March, after the buds have set, and going into the warmer temperatures in April and May as the stems of beautiful flowers come into full bloom.

So, all is not lost as you turn down those thermostats. There are still beautiful house plants that will thrive at those lower temperatures and brighten these dull, dreary winter days.

Carmen Cosentino operates Cosentino's Florist with his wife Anne Marie. He was elected to the National Floriculture Hall of Fame in 1998 and in 2008 received the Tommy Bright award for lifetime achievements in floral education.

