

Grow For It! Cyclamen

By **Master Gardner**

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UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

“Flowers always make people better, happier and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul.” — Luther Burbank.

Since flowers always make me happy, I totally agree with this quote.

Most garden perennials are winter-dormant, resulting in little color. If you are looking to bring winter color into your garden then cyclamen is the ideal plant for you.

The cyclamen plants we see in abundance in our local nurseries have their origins in the Eastern Mediterranean region. There are more than 20 species of the plant and a few of them are even considered to be frost-hardy. Most hardy varieties of cyclamen can bloom from late summer until late spring. Hardy cyclamen thrives in areas with shade to part-shade.

Cyclamen has distinguishing, dark green foliage featuring heart-shaped leaves and an attractive lighter green to almost-silvery pattern. Tall, graceful flowers are found in color variations of pink, red, white and lavender. Each plant produces an abundance of blooms; flower production greatly benefits from periodic deadheading as described below. Some varieties of cyclamen produce semi-double flowers while others might have petals that are frilled along the edge.

Cyclamen is classified as either Florist Cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*) or Hardy Cyclamen (*Cyclamen coum*). Florist cyclamen, best suited for indoor growth, tends to have larger flowers and requires a cool, semi-shade area in the house with a temperature range from 50 to 65 degrees. Hardy cyclamen can be grown in a protected garden bed, in pots or other containers and can be planted outside in USDA Zones 5-9.

With proper care, cyclamen is an easy-to-grow perennial. The plants can be grown in-ground in mounds or clumps or in pots and containers as a neat, tidy addition to a front porch or patio.

Plants grow up to about 6 inches tall with a spread of about 6 inches.

Cyclamen grows from corm-like tubers, preferably in rich, well-drained soil. Plants should be kept moist but not wet because too much water or inadequate drainage can cause the tuber to rot. They can be susceptible to gray mold, often caused by too much moisture. A good practice in watering the plant is to apply the water just below the outer leaf edge, as this will prevent the stems and tuber from getting too wet. If your cyclamen is in a container or pot, then you might place the container in a shallow saucer of water which will wick moisture from the bottom upwards. Don't water again until the soil is quite dry. A layer of mulch or fine garden bark around the plant will aid in moisture retention while giving it some additional protection from frost. Don't bury the top of the tuber in mulch because leaves and flowers emerge from the top of the tuber. Apply mulch just up to the base of the tuber.

During winter months, cyclamen plants continue to produce multitudes of flowers. Deadheading wilting blooms promotes more bloom. When a flower starts to fade simply hold the stem between your thumb and index finger and give it a gentle tug. Yellowing leaves can be removed in the same way. No pruning shears required for this plant.

Cyclamen is generally dormant from late spring through late summer/early autumn. The plant has no leaves and the only visible sign is the top of the corm-like tuber peeking out about a half-inch above the soil level. During dormancy, potted cyclamen can be moved to a shady garden area. My cyclamen are in containers so they are easy to move from the front of the house, which gets full summer sun to a shaded area under a Photinia hedge. Don't let tubers dry out during the summer, but apply water sparingly.

Cyclamen plants generally start to sprout new leaves from the top of the tuber in September. This is a good time to remove about 1-2 inches of soil from around the top of the tuber and replace it with an equal amount of potting compost. Start watering on a regular basis in order to keep the soil moist, but keep the plant in a shady area of the garden. By late autumn, the cyclamen should have numerous healthy leaves and be ready for another year of garden enjoyment.

Join the Master Gardeners on Saturday, Dec. 7, at 9:15 a.m. for a tour of the Sherwood Demonstration Garden. The garden is open to the public first and second Saturdays of each month from 9 a.m. to noon through the winter.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County visit mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on the website. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville behind

Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center.

See [mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden) for more information and days and hours of operation or call to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters see [ucanr.edu/master gardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram.