Question and Answer

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* Q. We love poinsettias for the holidays and place several around the house for decorations. The one issue is keeping them watered. It is hard to water them every other day because they are on furniture which we don’t want to damage with water. Any ideas?

1. Use 6 t0 8 ice cubes every other day and then once per week soak the plant in a sink half full of water. The melting ice cubes will usually not provide enough water to penetrate the decorative foil wrapper and/or over fill a small saucer.

For the soaking, remove the foil cover and set the container in the water for one-half water. Let it drain and then replace the foil cover. With this treatment your poinsettia will remain attractive until summer.

* Q. What are some different blooming plants we can try in our garden this winter? We always use pansies, snapdragons, and cyclamen but we want to add some others?

1. For the deep shade consider primula. They grow like pansies but with crinkly Kelly green leaves and waxy, intensely colored flowers. Protect them with slug and snail bait. In the sun plant sweet peas by seed to climb on a trellis and/or plant stock transplants. Both produce fragrant showy flowers that make excellent cut flowers.

* Q. Is it too early to cut back our esperanza and Poinciana? As per your advice we have cut back the tropical milkweed.

1. If the esperanza and Poinciana still look good, leave them in place until cold weather ends the bloom and knocks off the leaves. I generally wait until late February to prune back the dead tops on lantana, salvia, Poinciana, esperanza and other cold sensitive plants because the killed stems provide cover for wintering birds.

The tropical milkweed is a different story. We are pruning them back now at the request of researchers that want to verify that their evergreen nature does not change Monarch butterfly migratory habits or pose any other threat to their health. Research results should soon be available to let us know if the cutting back is actual necessary.

* Q. We have harvested our broccoli heads. The plants still look great. Will they still produce more or should we toss them in the compost pile?

1. The plants will produce a second crop of smaller side heads. Some gardeners like them better than the initial heads because they are produced in cooler weather and the flavor is better. Apply a cup of lawn fertilizer spread over an 8 ft. row to encourage more production.