

Gift a Plant

A few months ago I was conversing with one of my close relatives, and they made the comment that houseplants were one of the worst gifts one could receive whether it was for Christmas or any other occasion. This person wanted to know why I would actually give a gift that was very likely to be dead within a few months of being received. Honestly, I was shocked. Not only did this relative offend me because of my profession (I deal with plants on a daily basis), but I was somewhat offended on a personal level. Plants are one of the most common gifts I give for the many occasions where gift giving is in order.

Although I completely disagree with this relative, I will concede that many plants commonly given as gifts are rather hard to care for and should simply be thrown away or composted as their beauty starts to decline. This is especially true for plants like hydrangea, azaleas, chrysanthemums, calanchoe and cyclamen. Even if you can get these plants to survive past a few weeks, they will almost never again look as good as they did when they were first purchased. And they will almost never bloom again.

If you are interested in giving as gifts easy-to-care-for plants that will be a more permanent fixture in the indoor landscape, consider species such as pothos, spider plant, cast iron plant, philodendrons, dracaena and holiday cacti. These plants do not mind as much if you miss watering for a few extra days or if they are placed in less-than-ideal situations in a room. In fact, I have seen many of these plants survive indoors for several years. My bride's grandparents have a holiday cactus that has lived more than 50 years. It is still going strong. Holiday cacti are one of the few houseplants that will continuously bloom for the winter season-just place them near a window. The cooler night time temperatures near the window induce the plant to form flower buds. To keep the plant blooming all winter long rotate it 180 degrees every two months or so. This way half of the plant will always be forming buds while the other side has beautiful blossoms.

Another plant that is commonly available during the holiday season is Norfolk Island pine. This plant can do well indoors as long as it is placed where it receives bright indirect light and is kept away from excessive heat. Over a period of years Norfolk Island pine can reach several feet high.

To keep other houseplants healthy during the winter keep them away from cold drafts and heat vents. Also, it is a good idea to water less frequently and to hold off fertilizing until spring-giving houseplants a needed break.

I am not going to stop giving houseplants as gifts. However, to the relative that does not enjoy them, look forward to a fruit cake and an ugly tie for Christmas this year.