

Caring for Your Easter Plants

Easter plants announce the arrival of Spring.
Here are some tips on taking care of your favorites:

Narcissus

Two kinds are of special interest as house plants: the large trumpet-flowered varieties, whose blossoms are often 4 in. or more across and the tazetta varieties, which bear 4 to 8 fragrant, 1-2 in. trumpet-shaped flowers on each stem. Narcissus does best in bright, direct or curtain-filtered sunlight when blooming with night temp. of 40° to 45° and day temp. of 68° or lower. Tender tazettas will grow well in night temp of 55° to 60°. Keep soil moist at all times, but never allow the pot to sit in water. Do not fertilize. Hardy narcissus bulbs can be saved and planted outdoors in spring.

Hyacinths

With its sweet haunting fragrance, it's a flower that gardeners everywhere associate with spring. Most hyacinths survive winters outdoors in zones 4-10. They are also among the most popular house plants for midwinter flowering indoors. They do best in full sun. Plant them directly in the garden in Sept.-Oct. in zones 4-7, or when finished blooming in spring. To grow as houseplants, put in direct or curtain-filtered sun. Keep soil moist while the plants are growing, then dry after the foliage matures. Do not fertilize. Save the bulbs for planting in the garden in the fall.

Tulips

Tulips, a mainstay of spring gardens everywhere, can provide abundant flowers in a wide spectrum of colors from March through May. Tulips do well indoors, but they need special pretreatment and room temperatures in the 50s. Plant outdoors in spring when blooms have faded.

* **Narcissus, Hyacinths & Tulips (Bulbs)**

Currently regarded as the "Big Three" in Easter plants, they are all bulb plants. All 3 can be planted outside after their blooms have faded.

Gardenia

Correct temperatures are important! For flower buds to form, a night temp of 60°-65° is required, and during the day, about 10° higher. Bright light is essential, but avoid direct midday sun in a southern window during the summer. 3-5 hr. of direct sun is recommended. Keep soil continuously moist, only allowing slight drying. Water with boiled or rainwater. Do not let plant stand in water. Mist with warm water daily to provide adequate humidity. Fertilize with acid based fertilizer (Miracid or similar food) every 6-8 weeks.

* **Gardenias (Houseplant)**

The gardenia is the ultimate buttonhole flower. The aroma is intoxicating and the large, glossy, dark green leaves are a perfect background for the brilliant white flowers this plant produces

Lilies

Lilies are perennial (Hardy in zones 4-8). The bulbs have been specially treated to force them into flower. Plant them in the garden after the blooms have faded and the foliage has shriveled, in spring or early summer. Indoors, provide lily with bright light and direct sun for 5-7 hours each day. When the flower fades and the stalks turn yellow, plant outdoors in a sandy, well-drained, humus-rich soil. During the growing season water well but never let the bulb become waterlogged. Reduce water to let the bulb dry off after flowering. Plant out in late spring for flowering next summer.

* **Lilies (Bulb)**

Consider lilies as annuals when grown indoors. The bulbs have been specially treated to force them into flower. Plant them in the garden after the blooms have faded and the foliage has shriveled, in spring or early summer.

Hydrangea

Give plant as much light as possible, with direct sun indoors. And part shade outdoors. When in flower, normal room temperature is quite adequate. In winter, the plant prefers a temp of 45° which should be raised to 55° in Feb. for spring flowers. Hydrangea is winter hardy in zone 6 with protection. Hydrangeas love water and it does not hurt to immerse the pot in a bucket of water every second day. Feed once a week while flowering and in winter, water only every 10 days or so. Blue varieties need lime-free water. Fertilize once a week before flowering and every 6 weeks after. Do not plant outside until after last frost

* **Hydrangeas (Flowering Shrub)**

Hydrangea has a short life indoors (around 6 weeks). They make a lovely spring or summer outdoor plant, because once it's glorious mop heads of blooms are finished, it can be planted in the garden, where it will survive for many years.

Azalea

A pot grown azalea loves cool temperatures. It likes good light and small amounts of direct sun, so a north or east facing window is ideal. Keep the soil moist but not soggy, using rainwater or distilled water. Pick off faded blooms promptly. After the first season, repot in spring using lime-free soil and keep in the garden or on shaded patio throughout summer. Fertilize plant every 2 weeks. Keep the soil moist all season before bringing it indoors in fall.

* **Azaleas - Hardy (Flowering Shrub)**

Azaleas bring a sunburst of color into the house, from scarlet to apricot to white. A member of the Rhododendron family and originating from China and Thailand, they are dwarf shrubs that can grow up to 1.5 ft. in height and width.