

Two Choices for Cyclamen

By Kathy Wolfe
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Difference species each yield beautiful results

Many of us love the brilliant flowers and intricate leaves of the florist's *cyclamen* available in local nurseries during the holiday months. Did you know that a different species of this plant can provide abundant ground cover and a boost of color in your autumn shade garden? Hardy *cyclamen* may be just what you are looking for to plant under a tree or shady shrub.

The hardy *cyclamen* flowers may look delicate but the plants are tough. Most species can withstand temperatures to zero degrees or below. While *C. coum* and *C. pseudibericum* flower in winter or early spring, and *C. purpurascensin* late summer to fall, the most popular autumn flowering species in the Northwest is *C. hederifolium*.

Native to the mountain woodlands of southern France eastward to Turkey, *cyclamen* grow from slightly flattened, disc-shaped tubers. Its common name is "sowbread" because at one time it served as pig food. Flowers are smaller (stems 2" – 4") than those of florist's *cyclamen* (*C. persicum*), with shooting star flowers ranging from delicate white to dark pink, and clusters of small, heart-shaped leaves that can be either solid color or in intricately mottled patterns of gray, white and green.

Choose a planting spot where your *cyclamen* is protected from hot sun and severe weather exposure. Placing them under trees or high-branched shrubs, on the east side of the house, or in a rockery are good locations. Because of their low growing nature, having them at the front edge of the bed will be best for viewing.

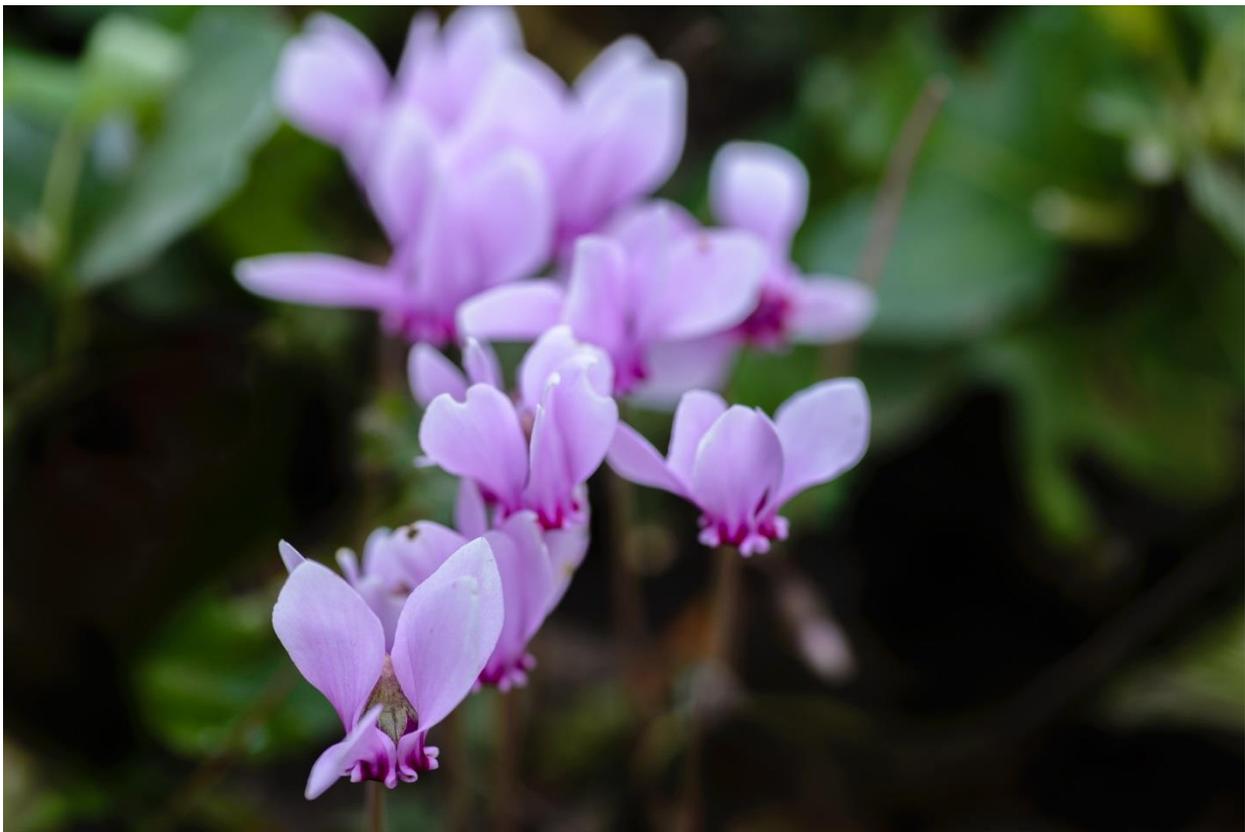
Hardy *cyclamen* grow best in well-drained soil that is moist but not wet. Add compost or manure to the soil and work in well. Buying blooming plants from a nursery will ensure you get the color and leaf design you desire. If planting from tubers, set them only ½" below the soil surface and spaced 4" – 6" apart.

Dozens of seeds may germinate during the summer and the resulting seedlings will grow into flowering plants in about three years. Tubers can be divided every four to six years if desired but this is not necessary. Transplant during the dormant season or just after they are finished flowering. Given ideal care, hardy *cyclamen* can survive for decades.

Florist's *cyclamen* (*C. persicum*) are a lovely addition to brighten your home in the winter months and have been a favorite since the early 17th century when they were brought from the Mediterranean to Western Europe. Under proper conditions, the vivid, orchid-like flowers can last six weeks or more before dormancy kicks in. Blooms are larger than those of the hardy *cyclamen*. These tender plants will tolerate temperatures to about 25 degrees outdoors, so are

generally grown as a houseplant. Purchase florist's *cyclamen* in bloom and with several newly formed buds and succulent leaves. Cultivars have been developed that produce double flowers or have a thin white edge on the petals, are striped or have ruffled edges. Some miniatures can also be lightly scented.

Florist's *cyclamen* can be a bit persnickety. Three things that can hurt *cyclamen* are over-watering, heat and extreme light. Find a cool spot in your house, between 55 - 65 degrees, and an area with some light but not direct sunlight. East or west facing windows can be good but southern exposure may be too bright. Over-heating encourages early dormancy. They require ample humidity. Kitchen windows or bright bathrooms might be a good location or placing a glass or decorative vase filled with water near the plant can help provide a humid atmosphere.



Hardy cyclamen can provide little spots of color throughout your garden just when other plants are dying off. *Both photos by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*

Keep them evenly moist using room temperature water but don't overwater. Fibrous tubers are prone to rot so don't oversoak or allow water to collect in the tray beneath the container. Try not to water the crown directly. Some people prefer to bottom water or set in water for about 15 minutes. Allow the plant to become almost dry before re-watering. Remove spent blossoms by twisting the stem and pulling sharply to remove it cleanly from the base. Fertilize lightly using a low-nitrogen fertilizer or houseplant food for blooming plants every two weeks when in active growth.

Re-blooming can be tricky. In late spring, the plants stop blooming and go into dormancy for two to three months. Reduce water and fertilizer at this point. You can move the plant outside for the summer but don't allow it to get too wet while leafless. Alternatively, place the dormant houseplant in a low light area for a few weeks and reduce watering to allow it to dry out. Remove the corm (bulb-like structure from which the leaves grow) and place it in dry vermiculite and store at about 50 degrees for 6 – 12 weeks.

Repot in June in a well-drained soil mix, keeping the upper half of the corm above the soil surface to prevent rotting. Move it to a shady area of your yard and begin watering again when the tuber starts forming new leaves. Feed using a balanced liquid fertilizer such as 10-10-10, diluted according to the package directions, twice a month until flower buds form. Bring the pot indoors before the first frost and place in a cool, sunny window and await new blooms.



Pests such as aphids, thrips, mealy bugs or spider mites may become a problem. Use insecticidal soap according to package directions to clean plants and remove pests before bringing plants back into your house. Isolate away from other houseplants for a few weeks until you are sure they are pest free.

Pet alert! According to the ASPCA, *cyclamen* are poisonous to both cats and dogs. Terpenoid saponins compounds in tubers and roots cause toxicity such as diarrhea, vomiting and salivation. Keep plants away from pets at all times. Call your veterinarian if ingestion occurs.

For more information on plants, seeds, care and more, contact the *Cyclamen* Society (www.cyclamen.org).

RESOURCES:

- “Hardy Cyclamen”, Terry L. Ettinger Horticulture Consulting Services. www.tlhcs.com/Recommended%20Plants/Bulbs/Cyclamen/cyclamen.htm
- “Late bloomers: Plant cyclamen for autumn pedals.” Alan Titchmarsh. Express UK. August 30, 2014. www.express.co.uk/life-style/garden/50432/How-to-grow-cyclamen-in-autumn
- “Cyclamen.” HGTV. www.hgtv.com/design/outdoor-design/landscaping-and-hardscaping/cyclamen
- “Hardy Cyclamen: A Showy Flower for the Autumn Garden.” Ed Hume Seeds. www.humeseeds.com/efcycl.htm
- “Cyclamen.” Susan Mahr. University of Wisconsin – Madison Extension, Master Gardener Program. December 1, 2014. <http://wimastergardener.org/article/>

- “Consider Cyclamen.” Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor, University of Vermont Extension. Department of Plant and Soil Science.
<http://pps.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/cyc>
- “How to Grow and Care for Cyclamen in the Garden.” Hardy Cyclamens
www.hardycyclamens.com/grow-hardy-cyclamens-outdoors.html