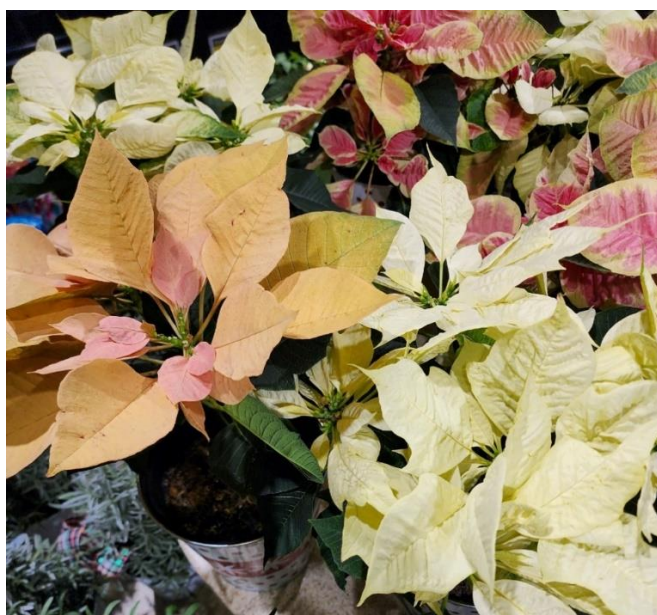




Holiday Happiness is Always Green  
 By Dr. Matthew Lisy, UConn Adjunct Faculty



This unique “orange-cream” colored Poinsettia (bottom left) is a new variety this year (photo by M. Lisy).

The holiday season is upon us again – how the time flies! It never ceases to amaze me how each and every year it seems like there is always something new in the plant world. In fact, much of the season involves plants. After all, many of us take a live tree into our homes. Others have a fake tree, but the love of plants is still felt. So many times, when we visit family or friends, we take a plant with us as a gift. So much of our holiday happiness seems to be tied to plants. It is as if we are revolting against the cold, barren landscape outside. There is hope, because in a few months we will be starting seeds indoors under lights.

One of the biggest things I look forward to each year are the Poinsettias. If variety is the spice of life, then these certainly fit the bill. Every now and then, there seems to be a new variety that pops up. It is these unique and rare color morphs that I like and hunt. This year, I found a truly orange one. Now this is not super bright orange, but a pale orange-cream looking plant. The

ones I saw did not seem to grow as aggressively as the other varieties, but if you are looking for something new, this is it! To add to its beauty, the newer central leaves are a pink, and turn to orange-cream as they mature.

There are many other planter-styled offerings this year as well. There seems to be more than normal, and I am not sure why there is this trend. What I have not seen much of are the frosty fern or cyclamins. I am sure they are around, but you will probably need to go to actual greenhouses to get them. Of course, the old standby Holiday Cactus (as its now called) are plentiful this year. Many stores do not make money on these, as it is just to get you in the store and start buying. Another interesting offering is a new variety of Kalanchoe. The flowers are pink, edged in white. There was a similar one at Thanksgiving that was orange, edged in yellow. These are really beautiful, and adding to the mystique is the fact that they have not been seen before. There is an interesting twist to an old favorite – the Amaryllis. There is a company that is decorating the bulb in some type of coating. They claim that you do not need to water these during their entire bloom time. Although I am skeptical, this would be interesting to test!



This pink, edged in white, flowered Kalanchoe is an interesting new variety (photo by M. Lisy).

As beautiful as all the plants are that I described are, in reality they are temporary decorations with the notable exception of the Holiday Cactus. People try to save them and keep them going, but they really never achieve their former glory and majesty. I would thank the growers for producing new ones each year, and send them to my compost pile. If that thought doesn't sit well, as an alternative, why not bring an actual houseplant to your dinner party or holiday gathering? This way, the recipient can enjoy it for years to come. I like African Violets, Pothos, or Sansevieria. Another extremely hardy plant that can live in dim light (as long as you don't over water it) is the *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*. I have had one in a brightly lit room in a small pot. My wife was going to take it to work, but kind of forgot about it. It has grown immensely. There is also a black version of it that is very striking. As an alternative, why not bring some seed

packets to your family or friends? They also make great stocking stuffers. Gift cards to your favorite greenhouse could work as well, then they could pick a favorite of their own!

For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.