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A cure for the winter blahs

There's always that time in January when life seems as dull and leaden as the winter skies. When you can barely remember the incandescent festivity of the holidays. When the only bright spot of color in your life is apt to be a red sneezy nose. Most people I know have a remedy or two. Some shop.

Of course shopping takes a lot of energy and when I'm depressed I can't find anything that makes me feel attractive under the fluorescent lights of the changing room and that's even more depressing.

Some people binge on hot fudge sundaes and chocolate bon bons — but then I'd have to face the depressingly tight waistband on my favorite skirt.

No — no shopping or bingeing for me.

I've found that fresh flowers brighten my spirits. You can pick them up at the florist or even the supermarket. They're not as expensive as a new dress and not fattening at all. The only problem is they don't last terribly long and that's why my ultimate answer to the winter blahs is a flowering plant.

Pat Leuchtman



Between The Rows

I'm especially fond of cyclamen and azaleas. Cyclamen is available with flowers in beautiful shades of red, pink or white, borne above the pretty leaves on delicate stems, but the plants are very hardy. They originated in the Iranian mountains and prefer bright light (little direct sun) and a cool room. If you turn your heat way down at night so much the better. Your cyclamen will thank you and bloom for a long period.

My bedroom is definitely cool at night and a cyclamen plant on my bed table makes me feel very pampered. You can buy cyclamen in full bloom and let it cheer you this winter and with very little trouble you can keep it until you need its inspiration next year.

Water it carefully to prevent the

exposed corms from getting waterlogged and rotting. Fertilize it every two weeks while it's blooming. When flowering is done let it rest. Stop fertilizing and reduce watering. Allow the soil to dry out between waterings.

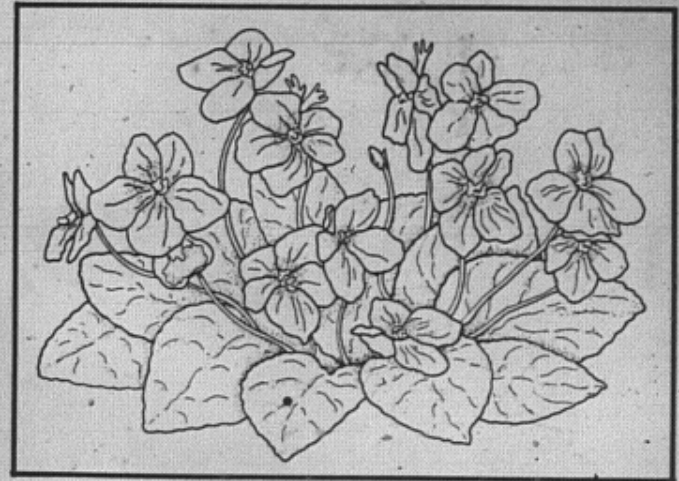
It will eventually lose most of its leaves, but don't you lose heart. In the fall you can repot it in fresh soil. The corms will be a little larger, but they shouldn't be planted any deeper than they were originally. Keep it watered while the new growth begins and start fertilizing when the buds appear. Cyclamen plants can last for years when cared for on this schedule.

The florist's azalea, sometimes called the Indian or large flowered azalea, is not hardy outdoors in our

climate. You can buy it now in full bloom to revive sagging spirits and even after it's done flowering it will be a handsome house plant with shiny foliage. Care for it indoors and it will bloom again next year, but probably a little later in the season.

Green houses are able to trick plants into blooming when they want. They can be carried over to bloom again but their own schedule will prevail.

Like cyclamen, azaleas need cool temperatures, bright light and some sun when they are blooming. An east or west window is ideal. Azaleas bloom best when they are slightly pot bound, but this means they use up moisture very quickly. Keep them well watered. Underwatering is one of the most common mistakes people make with azaleas. Though they must be watered whenever the top of the soil feels dry, they should not be fertilized while they are in bloom. When flowering is finished cut off all spent blossoms and prune the plant so that it keeps an attractive shape. Potted azaleas can spend the summer happily outdoors in the



shade or on a porch, but keep them watered. And this is the time to fertilize. Like all rhododendrons, these azaleas need an acid soil. You can provide this by using a houseplant fertilizer that acidifies the soil. Or you can mix up your own acid watering solution by dissolving half an ounce of iron sulfate crystals (available from the druggist) in one gallon of water. Use this routinely, from time to time, and you'll prevent

chlorosis, yellowing of the dark foliage.

I can think of nothing more delightful than a pot of red azaleas in the sitting room. I'll draw the curtains against the gloom and chill of the evening, light the lamps and maybe put on an album of Gershwin tunes while I wait for my husband to come in. I guarantee there is nothing like a little romance to raise the spirits.