Holiday plants may last a while with some special care

The holidays are in full swing and homes across the state are decorated with colored lights, snow globes, garland and mistletoe. In many homes, the Christmas tree is front and center in the picture window.

While the poinsettia has long been a favorite to use as decorations, there are several other choices of holiday plants that can be used as indoor festive decorations, too. Some may have purchased these plants themselves, while others are acquired as gifts. No matter where the plant originated, it’s going to take some special care.

The name Christmas cactus may be a little confusing as they are real cacti that don’t have any spines. Aptly named because it typically blooms during the holidays, the Christmas cactus has become increasingly popular. Its beauty may rival that of the ornaments on the tree. Place this plant in a bright window and be careful to not let it sit in water. As an added bonus, Christmas cactus can last from year to year. To get flowers to set for next year, set it outdoors for about three weeks in the late summer to early fall. Be sure to bring it back inside before the temperature dips into the mid-40s. Fertilize it monthly between April and October.

For many people, rosemary is just an herb, but this plant often is sheared into a topiary or pyramidal shape to resemble a Christmas tree. Its fresh, piney scent is inviting in the middle of winter. What makes it more special is trimmings make a savory addition to soups, stews and roasts. Rosemary does well in a south- or west-facing window. The more light, the better. Check the pot every few days and keep the soil evenly moist. In the late spring, move it outdoors and let it grow naturally. Fertilize every few months with a slow-release, pellet-type fertilizer.

Christmas peppers are popular due to their highly decorative fruit, which will be at peak color for about two months. They’ll be brighter and last longer if you provide high light and mild temperatures between 60 degrees to 75 degrees Fahrenheit and keep the potting medium moist. Fertilize weekly with a soluble fertilizer. Be aware that these peppers can be extremely hot, so it’s best to keep them out of reach of small children.

Norfolk pine is a long-lasting plant native to the South Pacific, so it wouldn’t do well outside. With its fringed needles, it certainly has the Christmas look. It prefers an east- or west-facing window and needs about six to eight hours of light each day, otherwise the lower branches may drop. Water when the soil is dry to the touch, but don’t let it dry out too much. That makes the needles turn brown. Refresh the planting medium every couple of years by topdressing with new soil. Fertilize every six to eight weeks with a standard fertilizer. Toss it when it becomes too leggy because it won’t re-grow branches that are lost.
No matter what type of plant you choose to adorn your home during the holidays, it will add a festive flair and splash of color to your décor.