Did you enjoy a flowering potted plant this spring? We have many resources to help you decide what to do with the plant when the blossoms fade.

After a long, bleak winter, we celebrate spring by sharing colorful flowers with friends and family. We may start gifting as early as Valentine’s Day or St. Patrick’s Day in mid-March. However, a bit later, like for Easter or Mother’s Day, floral gifts are widespread. Often, these gifts are cut flowers, which are added to our compost piles when their beauty fades. We recognize that cut flowers are "disposable" gifts. But what about potted plants? Are they keepers or disposable? That depends on what is in the pot.

If you are comfortable in your home, spring holiday plants will be also. They are most comfortable at room temperature, 65° to 72°F, and in moderately bright light. Like other houseplants, avoid areas with cold drafts and heat vents. If the plant is not disposable, apply fertilizer from spring through summer, following label directions. Keep the potting media moderately moist but not soggy. Always add a saucer under the pot to protect your furniture from drainage.

Growers schedule the potted plants to bloom at a specific time. Often, this time may be far from the plants’ natural bloom time. The greenhouse grower manipulates the temperature and day length to force the plants to bloom for a particular date. In many cases, this is very stressful for the plant, and these plants are indeed temporary and disposable. Toss the plant and its potting media into the compost pile for recycling.

**Oxalis triangularis** (formerly *O. regnellii*) of the wood sorrel family welcomes spring and St. Patrick’s Day to our offices and homes, whether Irish or not. Bearing three leaflets, these "shamrocks" make great houseplants. They may pause from blooming during warmer temperatures unless the room is air-conditioned.

The potted chrysanthemums (*Chrysanthemum multicaule*) available in the spring are florist’s mums and are not winter hardy. They’ve been tricked into blooming early. Snip off the faded flowers to keep the plant tidy and encourage bud formation. When it finishes blooming, compost it.

**Hydrangeas** (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) and azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.) are beautiful potted plants available in big box stores, supermarkets, and nurseries. Take care selecting these shrubs. Growers force them to bloom for Easter and Mother’s Day. Many, even most, of the varieties offered are not winter hardy in most of Pennsylvania. Decide if you want to add a splash of color to your home or a permanent shrub to your landscape. Read the tag carefully for the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone. Most of Pennsylvania is now Zone 6, with Zone 7 in the southern counties. A few years ago, I spotted a stunning display of blue and pink hydrangeas at the entrance of a big box store. Hardiness was not on the tag. After some internet research, I learned that those gift hydrangeas thrived in Zones 8 and 9. Each was an -eye-catching but temporary potted plant destined for compost. The situation is similar for blooming potted azaleas. When you purchase hardy varieties of bigleaf hydrangeas or azaleas, be sure to site them in a partially shaded area. Water regularly and deeply for the entire first growing season. Be patient, and they will re-bloom in the next season.

**Easter lilies** (*Lilium wallichianum*, formerly *L. longiflorum*) herald spring and reliably re-bloom outdoors in Pennsylvania. Keep the lily in bright light and well-watered. You may want to remove the yellow pollen-filled anthers from the flowers to prevent it from staining a tablecloth. As soon as the weather warms, dig a hole at least 6 inches deep in a sunny location with well-draining soil, remove the plant from its media, spread the roots, and drop it into the hole. Keep the area well-watered and fertilized until autumn. If the stalk and leaves become dry and brown, trim them off at the soil line, but remember where you’ve planted the lily. It will reward you with brilliant white trumpets in the late summer of the
following year. Yes, August is the natural time for these lilies to fill your garden with their fragrance each evening.

Treat potted daffodils and hyacinths the same way as Easter lilies. They will bloom in the following spring. The hyacinth flowers may be a bit smaller but just as fragrant. As lovely as potted tulips are, place the plants, bulbs, and media into the compost pile when the flowers wither. Forced tulip bulbs are unlikely ever to bloom again. You may have years of green leaves but nary a flower.

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