

# Robusta Jumbo Cyclamen



Left to right: 'Robusta Purple', 'Robusta Fuschia', 'Robusta Scarlet'.

Premium crops require special care. Find out what is needed for this over-sized cyclamen.

By Jeannine R. Bogard

**R**obusta answers the call for full, colorful crops adaptable for both home and garden with larger leaves and huge flowers, which will satisfy the needs of floral buyers in addition to stimulating impulse sales at retail. Robusta's strong and full-bodied habit will easily fill out 6- to 7½-inch containers, while the proportionally large blooms create a prolific bouquet of color. Seven colors make up the series: Fuchsia, Purple, Rose, Salmon, Scarlet, White and Wine.

Bred for the large-container market, Robusta blooms 2-3 weeks later than the Sierra series, so program Robusta for mid- to late-season sales (late November through February). Because Robusta's habit is larger than standard-sized cyclamen, there are a few nuances to growing these super-sized plants that differ from traditional culture.

## GROWING ON

Robusta requires partial shade to filtered sun. During the bright hot days of summer there is a risk after transplant for the plant to grow too quickly and develop large leaves too soon in the growth cycle. To avoid excessive leaf development during summer months, it is necessary to grow Robusta with modified fertility levels.

**Potassium.** Typically, cyclamen are initially grown at a nitrogen:potassium ratio of 1:1 and gradually increased to 1:2. During the last third of the Robusta growing cycle increase nitrogen:potassium ratios to 1:3. With Robusta's larger habit, potassium takes on a greater role in producing a higher-quality plant.

Potassium is important in the growth of cyclamen because deficiencies will result in soft growth, and plants are more susceptible to damage. Potassium is also important in translocating sugars and starches to the growing tips. Low potassium levels can result in stunted plants. As a general rule, plants normally absorb potassium during the first half of their growth cycle. Peak demand for potassium during cyclamen development occurs at bud set. Plants grown with reduced levels of potassium run the risk of reduced flower quality and overall shelf life. Optimum potassium levels will increase the overall flower count on cyclamen, thus creating beautiful bouquets of blooms.

The nitrogen:potassium relationship is important for other reasons as well. Potassium will counter many of the negatives of nitrogen. While nitrogen stimulates rapid, soft growth, potassium counters by promoting firmer tissues. And while nitrogen may increase sensitivity to disease pressure, potassium increases disease

resistance. To anyone who has grown cyclamen, the importance of promoting strong healthy plants cannot be over emphasized.

**Water.** Moisture management is important in producing a strong plant. Irrigate Robusta when the media has changed color from a dark black to a medium brown. After irrigation, the media should be wet to the touch, but not saturated. Watering early in the day allows the foliage to dry before nightfall and prevents crown rot. Water is important in the uptake of potassium into the plant. The diffusion of potassium is a slow process and occurs through the film of water that surrounds the roots. Crops kept too dry can appear stunted. However, once absorbed into the plant, potassium is readily translocated through the plant. GPN

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## Why Robusta cyclamen

Contrary to popular belief, bigger is sometimes, not always, better. But, bigger is always different — especially in this case. And, isn't "different" what everyone is looking for these days? I was looking at my 2003 California Pack Trial notes, in which this series debuted, and under the Robusta series, I wrote "HUGE!" in big letters. Well, these plants were huge and definitely caught my attention, as well as those around me. Take my word for it, seeing these plants in person does them more justice than photos.

You always hear me talking about alternatives — not this time. This doesn't have to be an alternative to anything; it's a great crop that you can just add into your production. The timing makes it great for winter flowering, and it can be programmed for year-round production. It does require a little more attention and care, but that's okay because this is a premium product. — **Carrie Burns**

