

12/21/2008 Cyclamen - SHOW DOME

*Cyclamen* is native to the Mediterranean region of the world. It belongs to the primrose family and includes about 20 species. In nature, it blooms in cooler weather, so it is a popular plant in the fall and winter displays in the Show Dome.

The long-stemmed leaves form a circle with a tuber at the base. The tuber allows the plant to become perennial where it is not too cold. The buds on the tuber can produce new stems after dormancy just as a potato tuber does, however cyclamen tubers can cause skin irritation and are poisonous in large quantities. Cyclamen leaves are simple (all one piece) and variegated with dark green and silvery patterns. Flowers are produced on long stems (photo 1) in the center of the circle of leaves.

The florist cyclamen is *Cyclamen persicum* is known as the Persian cyclamen although it has never grown wild in Persia (Iran). Plant breeders have produced a wide variety of colors from white to salmon to red to lavender. The five petals fuse to form a tube and the lobes are reflexed back similar to another genus in this family, shooting star (*Dodecatheon*, which is native to North America). The flowers have a sweet scent. After blooming, sticky seeds form in a round capsule (photo 2) about a half inch in diameter. In the wild, ants eat the sticky coating and disperse the seeds. After blooming, the stem from the old flower coils around several times, shedding the seeds closer to the soil (photo 3). The name "*cyclamen*" comes from the Greek for circle. This could refer to the round tuber at the base of the plant or the circular coils of the old flower stems.

Some years ago, large flowered *cyclamens* were formed on plants with double the normal chromosome number (tetraploids rather than diploids). Other plants are doubles with 10 petals rather than five, but they are often sterile. Breeders have made great strides in producing fast-developing hybrid cultivars (varieties) of the florist *cyclamen*. These plants can develop from seeds to flowering plants in about 8 to 9 months. Look for a variety of cyclamen at the Train Show. They also make wonderful winter houseplants.

Image credits: (Photo 1: D. Rodriguez, Texas AgriLIFE Extension service; Photo 2: John Lonsdale PhD, <http://www.edgewoodgardens.net/>; ; Photo 3: <http://www.srgc.org.uk/>)



Flowering Cyclamen



Seeds in capsules



Coiled flower stems