

Poinsettia Care

Poinsettias were introduced to Canada and the USA in 1852 by Joel Poinsett who was the US Ambassador to Mexico. A shrubby euphorbia that grows wild on the Pacific slopes of Mexico, it has been cultured and hybridized over the years and is a cherished symbol of Christmas.

Through many year of hybridization and cultivation there are now a variety of colours and even leaf patterns so you can find something to suit your holiday décor. There is the traditional red, hot pink, creamy white, pure white, soft pink and even spotted and patterned options.

Here are some tips to help you keep your poinsettia looking gorgeous throughout the holiday and into the new year.

SELECTING A HEALTHY POINSETTIA

Choose plants with thoroughly coloured and expanded bracts. The bracts are the colourful part of the poinsettia, while the true flowers are the small yellow centres. Look for plants with dense, plentiful foliage all the way to the soil line. The plant should be about 2½ times larger than its pot size, with strong, stiff stems and no signs of wilting.

CARING FOR YOUR POINSETTIA

- Place your plants in indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day. Make sure the room temperatures stays fairly constant between 16° to 21°C
- Water your plants thoroughly when the soil feels dry to the touch, but make sure it's never sitting in water
- Use a large roomy shopping bag to protect your plants when transporting them, poinsettias hate cold drafts
- Fertilize your plants after the blooming season with a balanced, all-purpose fertilizer

DON'TS

- Don't place plants near cold drafts or excessive heat
- Don't expose your plants to temperatures below 10°C (50° F)
- Don't allow plants to sit in standing water
- Don't fertilize your plants when they are in bloom
- Don't expose your plants to chilling winds when transporting

AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

With proper care your poinsettia can last long past the holiday season. By early April the coloured bracts will begin to turn or fall off, cut the plant back leaving four to six buds. Keep the plant near a sunny window making sure to water and fertilize regularly, by the end of May you should see vigorous new growth. Cut your plant back again in early July and again in early September to promote compact, full growth. Continue to nurture your plant into autumn.

Poinsettias set flower buds as the nights become longer. Beginning on October 1st, you need to keep the plant in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night by moving plants into a dark room or placing a large box over them. During the day, allow six to eight hours of bright sunlight. Continue this for eight to ten weeks, and your plants will develop a beautiful display of holiday colour.

POINSETTIAS ARE NOT POISONOUS

But you still shouldn't eat them, they are too pretty to eat. The urban myth that poinsettias are extremely poisonous is false. In-depth toxicology studies have disproved the charge that poinsettias are harmful. In fact, the Poisindex® Information Service states that over 500 leaves ingested by a 20kg (50lb) child would demonstrate no toxicity. Many people have skin irritations from the white sap (called latex) so you should try to avoid contact.

GARDENWORKS