

Care of House and Garden Plants

Poinsettias

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POINSETTIAS ARE traditional Christmas flowering plants which will last throughout the Christmas season and may be grown on to flower again next year.

Selecting Your Poinsettia

The plant you choose should have dark green foliage; fallen or yellow leaves indicate poor fertilization or a root disease problem. The flower bracts (red, pink or white) should be of good size and have little or no pollen showing on the actual flowers (those red or green button-like parts in the center of the colorful bracts). Be sure the plant is well wrapped when you take it outside on your trip home as exposure to low temperatures for even short periods of time can cause leaves and bracts to turn brown and fall.

Christmas Care

Place your poinsettia near a sunny window or other well lighted area. Do not let any part of the plant touch cold window panes. Poinsettias are usually grown between 60° to 70° in greenhouses, so it would be desirable to have this temperature for maximum keeping time. If temperatures are too high, the life of the bracts will be shorter. Poinsettias do not like drafts so keep them away from radiators and air registers as well as open windows or doors. To keep your poinsettia in bloom the maximum length of time, place it in a cooler room at night (55° to 60° is ideal).

Examine the soil daily and water only when it is dry to the touch. Always water enough to soak the soil to the bottom of the pot and discard some excess water. If you don't water enough, the plant will wilt and the lower leaves will drop. If you water excessively, the lower leaves will yellow and then drop. Apply a soluble fertilizer, such as used on house plants, once a month according to the recommendations of the manufacturer.

Late Winter and Early Spring Care

The new varieties of poinsettias (e.g. *Paul Mikkelsen*, *Eckespoint C-1*, *Annette Hegg*) are long-lasting flower types;



that is, their flowers remain on the plant for several months. During this time, side shoots will develop below the bracts and grow up above the old flowering stem. In order to have a well-shaped plant for the following year, it is necessary to cut back the original stem of a poinsettia to 4 to 6 inches in height, removing the old flower and one or two side branches. This will cause the buds located in the uppermost leaf axils to grow and develop. This cutting back is usually done in February or early March. Keep the plant in a sunny window at a temperature between 60 to 70° and water and fertilize as needed.

Late Spring and Summer Care

If the plant is too large for the old pot, repot into a larger pot. A soil mix of 2 parts garden soil, 1 part peat moss and 1 part sand, vermiculite or perlite plus 1 tablespoon of superphosphate thoroughly mixed in with each pot-full of soil makes a good mixture for poinsettias.

After the danger of spring frost is past and night temperatures exceed 50°, sink the poinsettia pot in the ground to the rim in a well-drained, slightly shaded position out-of-doors.

Between July 15 and Aug. 1 cut off the terminal portion of all shoots. These can be rooted in a mixture of half peat moss and half sand and flowered for Christmas using the procedure described below.

Fall Care

Take your poinsettia plant inside before the first frost (usually around Sept. 15 in lower Michigan). Place the poinsettia in a sunny window as before. In order to flower your poinsettia, you must keep the plant in complete darkness between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. daily from the end of September until color shows in the bracts (almost mid December). The temperatures again should remain between 60° and 70°. If this procedure is followed, the poinsettia will be in flower for Christmas.

GROWTH CYCLE OF THE POINSETTIA

