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Poinsettias

Michigan State University Extension Service

Care of House and Garden Plants

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*Poinsettias are traditional Christmas flowering plants that will last throughout the Christmas season. Some people try to reflower the*

*plants again the next year. This bulletin describes how to select and care for poinsettias and how to reflower them.*

## Selecting Your Poinsettia

The plant you choose should have dark green foliage. Fallen, yellow or damaged leaves indicate poor handling or fertilization, lack of water or a root disease problem. The colorful flower bracts (red, pink, white, or bicolor pink and white) should be in proportion to the plant and pot size. Little or no pollen should be showing on the actual flowers (those red or green button-like parts in the center of the colorful bracts).

## Christmas Care

Be sure the plant is well-wrapped when you take it outside on your trip home because exposure to low temperatures for even a short time can injure leaves and bracts. Unwrap the plant as soon as possible because the petioles (stems of the leaves and bracts) can droop and twist if the plant is left wrapped for too long.

For maximum plant life place your poinsettia near a sunny window or some other well-lighted area. Do not let any part of the plant touch cold window panes. Poinsettias are tropical plants and are usually grown at temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F in greenhouses, so this temperature range in the home is best for long plant life. High temperatures will shorten the life of the bracts. Poinsettias do not tolerate warm or cold drafts so keep them away from radiators, air registers, and fans as well as open windows or doors. Place your poinsettia in a cooler room at night (55 to 60 degrees F is ideal) to extend the blooming time.

Examine the soil daily and water only when it feels dry. Always water enough to soak the soil to the bottom of the pot and discard the excess water. If you don't water enough, the plant will wilt and the lower leaves will drop. If you water too much the lower leaves will yellow and then drop. If you keep your plant for several months, apply a soluble house-plant fertilizer, once or twice a month according to the manufacturers recommendations.

## Reflowering

If you plan on saving your poinsettia and reflowering it next year, follow the procedure explained below and illustrated on the back.

## Late Winter and Early Spring Care

Poinsettias have long-lasting flowers - their bracts will remain showy for several months. During this time, side shoots will develop below the bracts and grow up above the old flowering stems. To have a well-shaped plant for the following year, you need to cut each of the old flowering stems or branches back to 4 to 6 inches in height. Leave one to three leaves on each of the old stems or branches—new growth comes from buds located in the leaf axils. Cutting the plant back will cause the buds 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 and 70 degrees F and water as described above. Fertilize as needed every 2 weeks.

# POINSETTIAS



## Care of House and Garden Plants

## Late Spring and Summer Care

If the plant is too large for the old pot, repot it into a larger pot. Any of the common peat moss and ver-

miculite/perlite potting soils sold at garden centers are satisfactory and easy to use. If you want to prepare your own growing medium, use 2 parts sterilized garden soil, 1 part peat moss and 1 part sand, vermiculite or perlite plus 1 tablespoon of superphosphate per pot and thoroughly mix.

After the danger of spring frost is past and night temperatures exceed 50 degrees F, sink the poinsettia pot to the rim in the ground in a well-drained, slightly shaded spot outdoors. Remember that the plant may need to be watered more frequently than the rest of your garden. Between July 15 and August 1, prune all shoots to about 4 inches, leaving about one to three leaves on each shoot and fertilize.

## Fall Care

Take your poinsettia plant indoors at night well before the first frost (usually about September 15 in lower Michigan) to avoid chilling injury (this occurs when temperatures are below 45 degrees F for an extended period). The poinsettia can be placed back outdoors in the daytime when temperatures are warm enough or in a sunny window. Fertilize every 2 weeks. To reflower 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 (early to mid-December). The temperature should remain between 60 and 70 degrees F. Night temperatures above 70 to 75 degrees F may delay or prevent flowering. If you follow this procedure the poinsettia will flower for Christmas.

# GROWTH CYCLE OF THE POINSETTIA



Full Bloom.



Flower fades. Lateral growth starts.



Remove flower. Cut stems to 6 inches. Many laterals will start below break.



Repot in larger pot if necessary. Plant outside in pot.



Pinch all lateral shoots to 4 inches. Root shoots if desired, then pot.



Take inside.



Keep in light only from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Put in dark place (no lights) 5 p.m. to 8 a.m.

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