

Reblooming Your Christmas Poinsettia

by James A. Fizzell, Sr. Ext. Adviser
Horticulture

The Christmas poinsettia, probably the most difficult plant to reflower, is the one most often attempted. It is a real challenge even to the best gardener. But, if you pay attention to the details it is certainly rewarding when you see the cheery red showing up just in time for the holidays.

Here's how — when you get tired of looking at your point, put it away in a cool dark place. Check it once in a while and wet the soil so the roots and stems don't shrivel.

A couple of weeks after Easter (about the time your lily gives up) haul the plant out, cut it back to about six inches tall, repot it in the next larger size pot, and set it in a warm sunny place to start growing. When danger of frost is past, set it outside where it will get filtered sunlight. A lathe house is great, or plunge the pot in a well drained, protected place in your flower bed. Lift the pot every week or so to prevent rooting through, and turn it so you get even growth. Use some diluted liquid fertilizer if the plant goes off color.

Pinch as needed to shape the plant until about the end of August.

Keep a close watch for insects. Scale, mealybugs, and particularly whitefly, love points. Use pyrethroid plant spray if you see any uninvited guests.

Before the heating season starts, bring your plant indoors and set it in a bright, cool place. South windows and temperatures of 60 to 70 degrees are perfect.

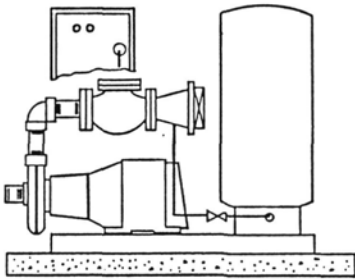
Keep the plant growing. You will see some leaf drop as the plant acclimates to its new home. Be careful not to overwater, and reduce the amount of fertilizer to compensate for reduced growth.

Now comes the difficult part. Poinsettias bloom in response to the **uninterrupted** dark dark period each day. They must have at least 13 hours of continuous dark every 24 hours.

A cool, spare room in which you never turn on lights (and where street or porchlights don't shine) is an ideal place for this short day treatment. Some people put the plant in a closet every night. Or, you will have to figure out some other way to shield the plant from ANY artificial light every night. As little as 1 to 2 foot candles of light in the middle of the night delays or prevents blooms. It divides the dark into two short periods. Try blank plastic, a garbage pail with a lid, etc.

Start the shade treatment about October 15. Be sure the temperature during the dark period is about 60-62 degrees and


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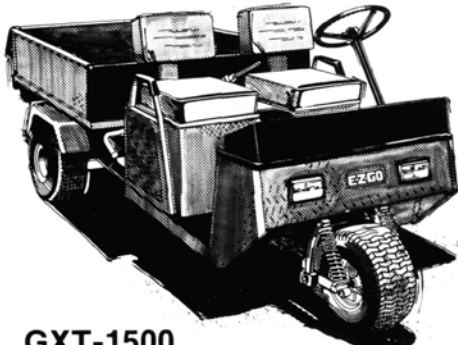
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that you put the plant out to grow each day in its favorite spot. (Some people have been known to leave the plant in the dark for months). It is important to keep the plant growing during this time. And don't forget to shade the plant **every** night. One slip-up and you have lost the battle.

By Thanksgiving, you should notice the leaves at the tips of the stems beginning to turn red and by mid-December the plant should be in full flower.

Seems like a lot of work, when you could just run down to the florist for a plant in full bloom. Yet nobody gardens because its easy ... it's fun. And there is a lot of satisfaction in being able to say, "I did it", when everyone said it couldn't be done.

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