

Pamper your poinsettia

IS THERE A POINSETTIA IN YOUR HOUSE? *Pamper it, it'll thank you for it. Here are some tips on how to keep poinsettias looking good for months, and keeping them through the year...*

Location and Temperature – Poinsettias thrive on indirect, natural daylight. Exposure to at least six hours daily is recommended. If direct sun cannot be avoided, diffuse with a light shade or sheer curtain. To prolong the bright color of the poinsettia bracts, daytime temperatures should not exceed 20° C. Avoid placing the plants near drafts, excess heat or the dry air from appliances, fireplaces or ventilating ducts.

Water and Fertilizer – Poinsettias require moderately moist soil. Water the plants thoroughly when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. Remove the plant from decorative pots or covers, and water enough to completely saturate the soil. Do not allow the poinsettia to sit in any standing water; root rot could result which could kill the plant. It is not necessary to fertilize the poinsettia when it is in bloom.

After the Holidays – When the bracts age and lose their aesthetic appeal, usually by late March or early April, cut the poinsettia back to about 8 inches in height. By the end of May you should see vigorous new growth. Pruning may be required during the summer to keep plants bushy and compact, but do not prune after September 1. Keep the plants in indirect sun and water regularly. Place your plants outdoors, where they can bask in the warmth of spring and summer, after outside night temperatures average 55° F or above. Continue regular watering during the growth period. Fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks throughout the spring, summer and fall months with a well-balanced, complete fertilizer. Around June 1, you may need to transplant your poinsettias into larger pots. Select pots no more than 4 inches larger than the original inner pot. A soil mix with plenty of organic matter, such as peat moss or leaf mold, is recommended. If you wish, you may transplant the poinsettias into a well-prepared garden bed. Be sure the planting bed is rich in organic matter and has good drainage.

Re-flowering – The poinsettia is a photoperiodic plant, meaning that it sets bud and produces flowers as the Autumn nights lengthen. The plants will naturally come into full bloom during November or December, depending upon the flowering response time of the individual cultivar. Timing the bloom to coincide closely with the Christmas holiday can be difficult without the controlled environment of a greenhouse. Stray light of any kind, such as from outside street lights or household lamps, could delay or entirely halt the re-flowering process. Starting October 1, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. Accomplish this by moving the plants to a totally dark room, or by covering them with a large box overnight. During October, November and early December, the plants require 6 - 8 hours of bright sunlight daily, with nighttime temperatures between 60 - 70° F. Temperatures outside this range may delay flowering. Continue the normal watering and fertilizer program. Following this regime for 8 to 10 weeks should result in a colorful display of blooms for next Christmas season.

Note: Despite what you may have heard, poinsettias are not poisonous, but don't try eating one! For some people the leaves can irritate the mouth and stomach, sometimes resulting in diarrhea or vomiting. The milky sap may also cause a poison-ivy like blistering if it contacts the skin unless it is immediately washed off. Poinsettia sap is an irritant, but it is not poisonous.