

POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias have become as much a symbol of the holiday season as the Christmas tree. They are available in traditional red colors or in an increasing variety of colors and mixes with new cultivars. People give and receive them as gifts, and use them for decoration. But the appeal of this plant isn't limited to just the holidays; people are always wondering how to keep their poinsettias alive year-round. It isn't always the easiest plant to maintain, but it can be done and we are here to help you learn how to do it.

First, let's talk about which plants to purchase. If the poinsettia is showing signs of stress in the store, avoid it. They are more likely to continue to decline than perk back up. Make sure all of the leaves are dark green and healthy from top to bottom. Avoid plants with bruised leaves or excessive amounts of dead foliage. The bracts (what we consider to be the flowers) are actually modified leaves and should be fully colored, including the edges. The true flowers are those tiny yellow clusters in the center of each group of bracts. Make sure these flowers are present at the time of purchase or that they are beginning to form. If the flowers have already faded and been removed, that is a good sign that the poinsettia is past its peak. Checking the soil is also a good idea. If it is wet and the plant is still droopy, it may have root rot. This is common because poinsettias are often sold with the container wrapped in a decorative sleeve. If the sleeve does not have a drainage hole cut in the bottom, the plant is likely to rot when watered.

When you get your plant home, either make sure there are cuts in the bottom of the decorative sleeve or remove it completely. It is a good idea to place the poinsettia in the sink or in a tray of pebbles when you water so that you can give a thorough watering without leaving the pot in standing water. They will need to be kept consistently moist, never soggy, and will perform best in an area that receives some indirect sunlight. They can be moved to the area where you want to display them for the holidays, but should be kept in the environment they prefer as much as possible if you want to keep them healthy. They should be kept away from hot and cold drafts, such as a heater vent or doorway. They should be kept in areas where temperatures are between 60-75F.

Keeping your poinsettia alive year-round can be done with proper care. Again, keep it in a bright area and water it often enough to be moist, never soggy. It is not necessary to fertilize poinsettias while they are blooming during the winter months, but after the bloom period, apply a balanced fertilizer every 2 weeks. We recommend a 20-20-20 fertilizer, such as **Peter's All-Purpose Plant Food**. Keep your poinsettia shaped with periodic pruning, but in late June, cut the entire plant back to 4-5" and thin out the growth to 5-6 healthy, well spaced stems. After cutting the plant back, increase the fertilization to once per week, maintaining your light and watering practices. Be on constant lookout for pests, primarily white flies, mealybugs, spider mites and gnats. Treat any sign of insect infestation immediately.

To get the poinsettia to rebloom, they need short days and long nights. To simulate this, begin placing your plant in a dark closet at 5 or 6 p.m., starting on September 30th. Leave the plant in the closet until 8 a.m. the following morning, then remove it and place the poinsettia back in its normal, bright location. Do not open the closet while the plant is in for the night and it's even a good idea to place a towel along the crack at the floor to prevent light penetration. Repeat this process for at least 40 days, or until the deep, colorful bracts have developed. At this point, care for the poinsettia should be maintained as previously described for after purchase. Don't let the myth about poinsettias being poisonous scare you from purchasing one. Scientific research has shown repeatedly that they are not harmful to humans or animals. In an occasional case, some humans have reported an allergic reaction to the milky sap in the stems, resulting in skin irritations. For this reason, we do advise using care when handling poinsettias, but they are not to be feared as toxic. And if we have not sold you on these lovelies yet one fast fact: Poinsettias have been rated very well on their ability to filter impurities from indoor air.

If you have any question please call, write or drop by:

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