

Christmas Poinsettia Plant Care & Selection

What better way to decorate for Christmas than by adding a festive poinsettia plant to your holiday decor? These plants come in many colors and sizes and will surely add to your Christmas spirit.

Poinsettia plants are clearly one of the most popular Christmas plants available today. It's no surprise. The plant provides a beautiful Christmas flower and has been admired in the United States since Joel Poinsett brought the plant into the country from Mexico the early 1800's.

Contrary to popular myths and urban legends, poinsettias are not poisonous to children or pets, however, the sap can cause some minor skin irritation to some people. These plants have been widely tested for toxins, and are proven to be safe -- but it's still not recommended to eat one! In fact, the POISINDEX Information Service, the primary information resource used by most poison control centers, states that a 50-pound child would have to ingest over 500 poinsettia bracts to surpass experimental doses. Yet even at this high level, no toxicity was demonstrated.

In 1992, the poinsettia was included on the list of houseplants most helpful in removing pollutants from indoor air. So, not only is the poinsettia a safe and beautiful addition to your holiday decor, it can even help keep your indoor air clean!

The Do's and Don'ts of Poinsettia Care

DO place your plant in indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day. If direct sun can't be avoided, diffuse the light with a shade or sheer curtain.

DO provide room temperatures between 68 - 70° F. Generally speaking, if you are comfortable, so is your poinsettia.

DO water your plant when the soil feels dry to the touch.

DON'T place plants near cold drafts or excessive heat. Avoid placing plants near appliances, fireplaces or ventilating ducts.

DON'T expose plants to temperatures below 50° F. Poinsettias are sensitive to cold, so avoid placing them outside during the winter months.

DON'T over water your plant, or allow it to sit in standing water. Always remove a plant from any decorative container before watering, and allow the water to drain completely.

DON'T expose your plant to chilling winds when transporting it.

DON'T fertilize your plant when it is in bloom.

How to Re-Bloom Your Poinsettia

When the poinsettia's bracts age and lose their aesthetic appeal, there's no reason to throw it out. With proper care, dedication and a certain amount of luck, you too can re-bloom your poinsettia!

By late March or early April, cut your poinsettia back to about 8" in height. Continue a regular watering program, and fertilize your plant with a good, balanced all-purpose fertilizer. By the end of May, you should see vigorous new growth.

Place your plants outdoors, where they can bask in the warmth of spring and summer, after all chance of frost has passed and night temperatures average 55° F or above. Continue regular watering during the growth period, and fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks.

Pruning may be required during the summer to keep plants bushy and compact. Late June or early July is a good time for this step, but be sure not to prune your plant later than September 1. Keep the plants in indirect sun and water regularly.

Around June 1, you may transplant your poinsettia into a larger pot. Select a pot no more than 4 inches larger than the original pot. A soil mix with a considerable amount of organic matter, such as peat moss or leaf mold, is highly recommended. In milder climates, you may transplant the plant into a well-prepared garden bed. Be sure the planting bed is rich in organic material and has good drainage.

The poinsettia is a photoperiodic plant, meaning that it sets bud and produces flowers as the Autumn nights lengthen. Poinsettias will naturally come into bloom during November or December, depending on the flowering response time of the individual cultivar. Timing to produce blooms for the Christmas holiday can be difficult outside of the controlled environment of a greenhouse. Stray light of any kind, such as from a street light 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 overnight with a large box. During October, November and early December, poinsettias require 6 - 8 hours of bright sunlight daily, with night temperatures between 60 - 70° F. Temperatures outside of this range could also delay flowering.

Continue the normal watering and fertilizer program. Carefully following this regime for 8 to 10 weeks should result in a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season!

Poinsettia Facts

- The showy colored parts of poinsettias that most people think are the flowers are actually colored bracts (modified leaves).
- Poinsettias are priced according to the number of blooms. The more blooms, the more expensive the plant.
- The flowers or cyathia of the poinsettia are in the center of the colorful bracts (yellow buds).
- Poinsettias are the best selling flowering potted plant in the United States. In 2004 over 61 million plants were sold.

December 12 is [National Poinsettia Day](#)