

Poinsettia – *Euphorbia pulcherrima*

The plants we now know as poinsettias found their way to the United States via the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett, in 1828. It didn't take long for the brilliant red and green plants to catch on as house plants. By 1836, they were being cultivated and sold for that purpose.

Poinsettia Care

Poinsettias thrive in moderately moist soil. This means it is important to water the plant thoroughly whenever the soil feels dry to the touch. When watering, ensure water flows out of the drainage hole, but avoid letting the plant sit in standing water. If the container is wrapped in foil, remove the foil before watering. Always discard excess water if it collects in the drainage tray.

To maintain their vibrant color, keep poinsettias away from high-traffic areas, cold drafts, and excessive heat. Poinsettias flourish in indirect natural light, requiring at least six hours of exposure daily. A Poinsettia does not require fertilizer while it is in bloom. The ideal temperature range is 67-70°F during the day and 60-62°F at night. Poinsettias do well in the home and keep their color until mid-March. Don't throw them away after the blooming cycle because, when properly cared for, poinsettias can be enjoyed year after year - growing and reblooming around the holidays.

With a little care you can keep your plant alive and healthy beyond the holidays. Place the poinsettia in a south, east, or west facing window that receives bright light. Begin your watering routine by removing the plant from its foil or outer pot and adding a drip tray. To avoid root rot, ensure your pot is free draining so that the plant is never sitting in water. When you begin to see new growth, like green leaves, bracts or stems, begin adding an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer. In late spring or early summer your poinsettia can be transplanted into a container a few inches larger than the original.

Getting Your Poinsettia to Rebloom

The most important task will be excluding light while keeping the plant happy and healthy. The lack of light prevents the production of chlorophyll, a natural pigment that makes the plant green. This enables the bracts to color up in red, pink or white depending on your variety. In late September, begin placing your plant in total darkness for 16 hours each day. Follow the hours of darkness with 8 hours of sunlight every day. A closet or box works great to exclude light. You can reduce the levels of water and fertilizer as the plants is getting a lot less light. After about two months, around Thanksgiving, resume normal light conditions and continue to reduce water and fertilizer. You should have a reblooming colorful poinsettia once again.

Because poinsettias are in the *Euphorbia* genus, they will all ooze a milky latex sap when leaves or bracts are broken. The sap can be irritating to eyes and skin – especially to those with a latex allergy.

Did you know:

The famously colorful leaves of poinsettias aren't flowers: they're bracts, which is a botanical term for specialized leaves. The bracts look like petals and at the center of each bract are little yellow flowers. It is the bracts that color up brilliantly each season giving the plant its distinctive holiday look.