

All About Poinsettias

The Poinsettia originates from Mexico. Related to the common garden perennial and several indoor plants, the scientific name is *Euphorbia pulcherrima*. The Poinsettia was named in honor of Joel Robert Poinsett, an American ambassador to Mexico.

The red, pink, yellow, white or green bracts, the showy parts of the poinsettia, are actually modified leaves, not flowers. The actual flowers (or cyathia) exist in the center of the bracts and are a grouping of tiny, individual yellow blooms that lack their own petals.

Contrary to widespread belief poinsettias are NOT poisonous. The Ohio State University found ingesting large amounts of the plant to be nontoxic, as did POISINDEX, which determined "It would take more than 500 leaves to be eaten by a 50 lb child to exceed the experimental dose to be found toxic."

Choosing Poinsettias

When choosing a Poinsettia, look for plants that are brightly and fully coloured. Plants should have an abundance of cyathia, as well as dense, rich green foliage that is balanced and full from all angles. Look for plants with stiff stems, avoiding those that show signs of wilting or breaking. Wilted and yellowed leaves indicate that the plant was over or under watered.

If you find poinsettias still in their sleeves, do not purchase them. When they are shipped, they should be taken out of their sleeves right away, otherwise the leaves will start to curl and drop.



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Transporting Poinsettias

When taking the poinsettia home, ensure it is wrapped in a paper sleeve. Poinsettias cannot tolerate temperatures below 10°C (50°F). If the car has been idle for some time in cold weather, it is important to warm it up to prevent damaging your poinsettia. When you get your poinsettia home, make sure it is unwrapped right away.

Caring for Poinsettias

Place your poinsettia in bright light. A spot that gets about 6 hours of bright but indirect light is ideal. Direct sun will shorten bloom life. If a south facing window is the only choice, screen with a sheer curtain. Avoid drafty areas or excessive heat (near entrances, heat registers). Normal room temperatures are ideal; in between 20° and 22°C (68° and 70°F).

When watering your poinsettia, do not overwater nor allow it to stand in water. If your poinsettia comes with a decorative pot sleeve it is important to ensure the sleeve is taken off before watering to allow all the excess water to drain away. Water when the surface of the soil dries out. Do not allow the soil to dry out excessively.



Keeping your Poinsettia from Year to Year

January: After blooms fade, begin to fertilize every two weeks with 20 – 20 – 20 at half strength.

February: Keep your poinsettia near a sunny window and keep it evenly moist

April: Cut back stems to 6” above the soil.

May: Fertilize with 20 – 20 – 20 at 1 tsp. per gallon of water at every third watering.



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June: Remove the plant, and check for an abundance of roots, which shows that the plant needs repotting. You can either repot into a pot one size up or simply take it out of the pot and trim one inch from the sides and bottom of the root ball and repot into the same size pot.

Use an all purpose potting mix for this. Place your poinsettia outside where it can receive light shade provided the temperature does not drop below 10°C (be prepared to bring your poinsettia in at night if this happens). Fertilize with 20 – 20 – 20 at 1tsp per gallon of water every second watering.

Mid-August: Keep the plant inside in direct sunlight, cutting the stems back, but leaving three or four leaves per stem. Continue to water and fertilize.

Mid-September to December 1: Position your poinsettia next to a window until 5 p.m. From 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. place it in a closet or dark box for complete darkness.



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