



Rockin E Gardening Handouts

Tips and Suggestions for 'Year-Round' Gardening

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Poinsettia Care

Bright and cheery, poinsettia is a traditional decoration at Christmas time. Its "flowers" are actually leaf-like bracts that surround the tiny, yellow, true flowers in the center. Poinsettias are easy to grow and can add a wide variety of color to your home. Poinsettias are available with white, pink, red, yellow, speckled, and even multi-colored bracts. More poinsettias are commercially grown in the world than any other houseplant or flower. Two-thirds of all poinsettias grown in the world are sold in the United States. Almost everyone in the United States buys at least one or two poinsettia plants every year, many people buy even more.



Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous plants. The milky sap is usually harmless but in rare cases it may irritate someone's skin. Fortunately the sap doesn't taste good because it may irritate the stomach, but it will not poison anyone.

Even though poinsettias are easy to grow they are not "foolproof". Many people have problems with them dropping their leaves prematurely, or losing their bracts. The length of blooming time depends on how well you take care of your plant when you first buy it.

Light suggestions

All blooming plants need a considerable amount of light to keep their blossoms healthy. Poinsettias also need plenty of light to keep them looking their best. Your poinsettias were grown in a greenhouse where they had ideal growing conditions. The closer you keep your poinsettia to those conditions the longer your poinsettia will stay looking good.



If you have enough light to read, you generally have enough light to keep your poinsettia healthy for a month or two. If not, you may need to use a "Grow Light" to supplement the needed light. A "Grow Light" will also enhance the red color, making your plant appear much brighter.

The colorful parts you see on poinsettias are not flowers, they are called 'Bracts'. Poinsettia's flowers are small and yellow and are located in the center of the large, colorful bracts. These bracts are to attract butterflies, moths, and other insects needed to pollinate the flowers. You can find varieties of poinsettias with large bracts or small bracts. You can also find a numerous array of colors including, white, yellow, pink, red, striped, and multi-colored bracts.



Temperature suggestions

Keep your poinsettia between 60 and 70 degrees F. during the day and above 55 degrees F. at night. If you keep them too hot the blossoms will fade prematurely. If you keep them too cold the leaves may drop off. **Be very careful while transporting your poinsettias from the store to your home; don't let them freeze.**



Poinsettias don't like extreme temperature variations such as cold air from open doors and windows, or hot air from

furnace vents. Even warm temperatures from being set on top of a television set can cause your poinsettias to fade prematurely.



Watering suggestions

Poinsettias, just like other blooming plants, need plenty of water during their blooming period. They may need to be watered once or twice a day; once or twice a week; or once or twice a month, depending upon the size of pot and the temperature of the room they are in. Water poinsettias when the soil, an inch below the surface, is dry to the touch.

If your plants are wrapped in foil make sure to remove the foil from the bottom of the pots, or cut a hole in the foil, to allow proper drainage. Place your poinsettias in saucers. Give your plants plenty of water, enough to fill the saucer. Be sure to empty the excess water from the saucer in one hour. Do not let your plants set in the water for long periods of time.

Too much water may be just as bad for your poinsettia as not enough water; sometimes its even worse.

Fertilizer suggestions

Most poinsettias do not need fertilizer to keep them looking nice just for the Christmas season.



Your poinsettia was fertilized regularly ever since it was planted in August, to make it look pretty when you bought it in December. If you want your plant to stay looking its best, you can still fertilize it. Use **Ferti-lome Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer** every two to three weeks. Even if you don't fertilize your plant, it will still look nice until Christmas, it just may not look its best. It may start to drop some of its leaves prematurely.

However, if you want to keep your poinsettias looking good throughout the entire winter season, and into the spring season, you will definitely need to fertilize your plants regularly.



What About Next year?

Keeping a poinsettia from year to year requires a little effort but, if you have the desire, it can be done. If you seem to lose interest in this along the way, you are in the company of many others. This process requires a lot of dedication and effort.

Water and fertilize your poinsettia regularly until the blossoms die and most of the leaves are gone.

February - Your poinsettia may begin to fade in color. Keep your plant near a sunny window.

April - During the middle of April, cut the stems back to approximately 6" above the soil.

May - Start fertilizing with a balanced (20-20-20 or 20-10-20) fertilizer at a one teaspoon per gallon of water every third watering. The pot may be placed outside, in a lightly shaded, area when the temperature does not fall below 55° F.

June - Remove the plant from its pot and check to see if the plant needs repotting (an over abundance of roots). If you do need to repot, use **Black Gold Potting Soil**, and a little larger pot. Fertilize with one teaspoon of a balanced fertilizer per gallon of water every second time you water.

Middle of August - When night time temperatures start dropping below 50 degrees, bring your poinsettia back inside the house. The plant should be kept in direct sunlight. Cut the stems back again, this time leaving three or four leaves per stem. Continue to water and fertilize. Start using **Fertilome Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer**. Remember that plants don't need as much water when they are inside the house as they do when they are outside; make the necessary watering changes.

Poinsettias are very sensitive to changes in light. Poinsettias naturally start to bloom when the nights get longer, not because the days are getting shorter. To make your poinsettia bloom in December your poinsettia needs 8 hours of good light and 16 hours of total darkness, starting mid-September.

Middle of September to the First of December: Make sure you keep the temperature between 60 and 70 degrees F. during the day and above 45 to 50 degrees F. at night. Fertilize your poinsettia regularly with **Blooming and Rooting Fertilizer** and water it consistently, but not constantly.

The plant should stay in direct sunlight (next to a window), or under a grow light, from 8:00am until 5:00pm. From 5:00pm to 8:00am the plant should be placed in complete darkness.

You may be wondering, "How do I accomplish this?" Some options are putting the plant in a closet or putting the plant in a 'light-tight box'. Any break in darkness, even opening the closet door for a few minutes, can prevent your poinsettia from blooming on time.

By mid-November you should see color showing in the bracts. Keep up the closet treatment until Thanksgiving, when you can



keep your poinsettia out for Christmas.

Now you have your poinsettia from last year, to enjoy again for the new holiday season. You may be wondering, "*Why doesn't it look like the plants in the stores?*"

Even though you provided all the care your plant needs, you cannot provide a professional greenhouse environment. The professional greenhouse offers an environment with controlled lighting, controlled temperatures, regular fertilization, and professional growers. This environment will produce larger, fuller plants than you can produce in your home.

This is your plant and you did all the work to make it bloom again! Be proud of your accomplishment.

Poinsettias growing outside in tropical areas (Mexico, South Africa, Southern California) live for many years and can grow ten to fifteen feet tall. They can be covered with hundreds of flowers.

Insects

Very few insects bother poinsettias during the Christmas season because the growers have sprayed them regularly to prevent insects.

You may see a few little white flies, or a few little black fungus gnats appear. If you do, spray them with a house plant spray, but do not spray the tops of the plant or you may discolor the bracts. Spray the lower part of the plant and underneath the leaves. You can also place Yellow Sticky Paper Traps next to your plants. It is a good way to control whiteflies and fungus gnats, without using chemicals.

With the proper care, your poinsettia can stay colorful through the Christmas season and well into spring. If you want to keep your plant from year to year all you need is patience, a little luck, and a good green thumb.

Poinsettias At A Glance

When you purchase your poinsettia, make sure it's the last stop of the day. Poinsettias like warm temperatures and can be damaged if left in a cold car for several hours.

If you had your poinsettia sleeved at the store, remove the sleeve as soon as you get home.

Choose a spot in your home that has bright, indirect light, avoiding any drafts or heat sources. If your plant starts to drop a lot of leaves, try moving it to a brighter location.

Day temperatures should be between 65 and 75 degrees. Night temperatures can be cooler, but shouldn't get colder than 55 degrees.

Water your plant thoroughly after the surface of the soil dries out – on average every 2-3 days depending on how warm your home is. Over-watering is the most common reason for poinsettia troubles.

Apply enough water so the pot is evenly moist and begins to drain out of the bottom of the pot.

If you're using a pot cover or decorative container be sure to drain out any excess water that has dripped through the pot.

