



Selecting and Caring for Poinsettias
By Laurel Rady
UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

When you go shopping for a Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) to brighten your home during the holidays, you might have in mind a certain color of flower that you want. However, the dramatic, brightly colored portions of a Poinsettia that most of us think of as flowers are actually modified leaves, or bracts. The Poinsettia's actual flowers, called cyathia, are the tiny clusters at the center of these bracts. Taking a few minutes to examine the bracts and cyathia will help you choose a beautiful, long-lasting plant.

A Poinsettia should look full, balanced, and attractive on all sides, and be about two and a half times taller than the diameter of its container. It should never be drooping or wilted. Choose a plant with leaves and stems that are dark green down to the soil line. Avoid plants with fallen or yellowed leaves. Examine the cyathia, at the center of the colored bracts. Select only Poinsettias with cyathia that are green or red-tipped and fresh-looking. Do not select a plant with yellow cyathia, or with yellow pollen covering the flowers; yellow cyathia and pollen indicate that the plant is past its prime and will not last. Check the soil. If it is wet and the plant is wilted, it could have root rot. Check the undersides of leaves for insects, such as aphids and whiteflies. Avoid plants that are crowded close together in displays; this causes premature bract loss. Also avoid plants that have been displayed in paper or plastic sleeves, as this causes the Poinsettia to deteriorate at a faster rate. When taking the Poinsettia home, have it sleeved if the outside temperature is lower than 50 degrees.

12/16/2020

The length of time you will be able to enjoy your Poinsettia is dependent on the maturity of the plant when you buy it, and how you treat it. With care, your Poinsettia should retain its beauty for weeks, and some varieties remain attractive for months!

After you bring your Poinsettia home, unwrap it carefully and place it in indirect light. Six hours of light each day is ideal. Place the Poinsettia in a sunny window, but do not let any part of the plant touch the cold glass. Keep the Poinsettia away from warm or cold drafts, radiators, heaters, air registers, open doors, and open windows. Poinsettias require a daytime temp of 60-70 degrees F, and nighttime temp of 55-60 degrees F. Move the plant to a cooler room at night if necessary. Avoid extreme temperature variations, as this will shorten the plant's life. If the Poinsettia's pot is wrapped in foil or paper, remove the wrapping or punch holes at the bottom so water can drain out into a saucer. Check the soil daily. Water sparingly, and only when soil is dry -- overwatered or under-watered plants drop their bracts sooner. Discard any excess water so the saucer stays dry.

If you keep the Poinsettia past the holidays, apply a water-soluble houseplant fertilizer once a month, following package directions, but do not fertilize when the Poinsettia is in bloom. With good care, it should last six to eight weeks or longer in your home. In the spring, when all danger of frost has passed, move your Poinsettia outdoors, in an area with morning light, afternoon shade, and no exposure to rain or wind.

To get your Poinsettia to re-flower, you must keep it in total darkness between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. from October 1 until color shows on the bracts, usually around mid-December. Covering the plant with a light-proof bag or placing it in a closet may work. Any exposure to light during the night can prevent re-flowering. Night temperatures should be lower than 65 degrees F to prevent decay.

With proper care when choosing your Poinsettia and after bringing it home, this popular plant can bring cheer to your home during the holiday season and beyond. Happy holidays!

Due to the pandemic, Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future continue to be limited. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we are doing our best to provide virtual learning opportunities. We currently have no events scheduled, but you can find our recorded classes on many gardening topics here:

https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/Public_Education_Classes/Handouts_-_Presentations/.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public open twice monthly, on the first and second Saturdays from 9 am to noon, through the end of March. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a

12/16/2020

Master Gardener” option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.