



Poinsettia Care



Poinsettias are the traditional Christmas plant, and with the introduction of long-lasting cultivars during the past several years, its popularity has increased. It was introduced to the United States in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, first U. S. ambassador to Mexico who obtained plants from the wilds of southern Mexico. The common name for the exotic plant, poinsettia, came from his last name. Botanically, the plant is known as *Euphorbia pulcherrima*.

Light

If you get a potted poinsettia for your home or office, place it near a sunny window where it will get the most available sunlight. A window that faces south, east or west is better than one facing north. If placed outside, any location should provide adequate light.

Temperature

To keep the plant in bloom, maintain it at a temperature of 65° to 70° F. during the daylight hours. If the plant is indoors, move it to a cooler place at night if possible. Since root rot disease is more prevalent at temperatures below 60° F., don't put the poinsettia in a room colder than this. Poinsettias are native to semi-tropical climates, so plants located outdoors should be moved indoors or to another warm area when nighttime temperatures remain below 50° F. for several hours. Avoid exposing the plant to hot or cold drafts, (e.g. furnace air outlets or windy outdoor locations) which may cause premature leaf drop.

Water

Examine the soil daily, and when the surface is dry to the touch, water the soil until it runs freely out the drainage hole in the container. The amount of water recommended in the following table for use in various size containers insures that enough water will be applied so that some will run out the drainage hole. If a saucer is used, discard the water that collects in it. Do not leave the plant standing in water. Overly wet soil lacks sufficient air, which results in root injury.

A wilted plant may drop its leaves prematurely, so try to keep it well watered. Plants exposed to high light and low humidity require more frequent watering.

| Pot Diameter (Inches) | Fluid Ounces of Water Per Pot |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4 | 6 |
| 5 | 9 |
| 6 | 12 |
| 7 | 16 |
| 8 | 20 |

Reflowering

Poinsettias can be reflowered the following Christmas, but unless a year-long schedule of care is observed, the results usually aren't very good. For such a schedule, continue normal watering of the soil until the first of April, then allow it to dry gradually. Do not let it get so dry at any time that the stems shrivel because this is a sign of dying. Following the drying period, store the plant in a cool (60° F if possible), airy location.

In the middle of May, cut the stems back to about 4 inches above the soil, and either replant in a pot 1 to 2 inches larger in diameter or shake old soil off the roots and repot in the same container, using a new soilless mix. A good potting mixture that retains moisture but drains easily is essential. Water the soil thoroughly after potting; wait five minutes and water again. Then put the plant in a sunny location and water when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch. After new growth appears, fertilize every two weeks with a complete-analysis, water soluble fertilizer at the rate recommended on the label for flowering plants.

In early June, leave the plant in the pot, move it outdoors, and place it in a lightly shaded location. Continue watering and fertilizing the plant while it is outdoors. Pinch each stem (remove 1 inch of terminal growth) in early July. Then, between August 15 and September 1, cut or pinch the new stems back, allowing three or four leaves to remain on each shoot. After this second pinch, the plant may be brought indoors and placed near a window with a sunny exposure. If the plant is not pinched, it will grow too tall and be unsightly. Continue watering and fertilizing.

Poinsettias are short-day plants, which means they flower about 10 weeks after the daylight shortens to about 12 hours or less. Therefore, to have the plant in full flower by Christmas, keep it in complete darkness between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. from the first part of October until Thanksgiving. During this period, any kind of light exposure between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. will delay flowering. A closet, opaque box or opaque cloth will keep the plant in darkness during those hours. Remember to put the plant near a sunny window in the daytime. Continue fertilizing the plant until mid-December.



Are Poinsettias Poisonous?

Various reports over the years have led the general public to believe poinsettias are toxic to humans; however, this has not been authenticated. Research conducted at The Ohio State University using rats, which have a similar digestive system to humans, tests have not shown that leaves, bracts, or cyathia (true flowers) are toxic. Although no tests have been made (officially) on humans, it is reasonable to believe the alleged poisonous nature of the plant is very questionable. Other institutions have proven the old wives' tale that poinsettias are poisonous to be false.

More Information

Additional tips and facts are available from the [University of Illinois Cooperative Extension](#).

Adapted from: McMahon, P., C. Pasian, J. Metzger, and J. Youger-Comaty. 1996. Poinsettia care in the home. Ohio State Univ. Horticulture and Crop Science Department Extension Fact Sheet HYG-1248-96.

