

# **Poinsettia Care for the Consumer**

The Poinsettia, often referred to as the "*Christmas Plant*", was first brought to the USA from its native land: Mexico, in 1825 by the first US Ambassador *Joel Robert Poinsette*. Today, with the multitude of colors, sizes, and shapes available, poinsettias offer an abundance of holiday cheer for every décor.

## **Tips for the Wise Consumer -**

When making your poinsettia selections, the following tips will help you select a plant that will last throughout the Holiday Season:

If you buy your poinsettia at a retail store that does not specialize in plants, the store may not provide proper care for the plant. Remember when purchasing your poinsettia to choose the one that is not wilted and appears to be cared for. Avoid the plants with foliage that is beginning to yellow.

The actual flowers of the poinsettia plant are the golden yellow clusters (cyathias) in the center of the colored bracts (the colored bracts are actually the plant's leaves which change color to attract insects and not flower petals as most consumers think). As you choose your poinsettia, make sure the plant that you choose still has the cyathias.

If you purchase your poinsettia from a store that has kept the plastic or paper sleeve packaging on the plant, remember: if this packaging has been kept on the poinsettia for a lengthy amount of time, the leaves may yellow and drop before the Holiday Season is over.

You, as a consumer, should look for the wide variety of colors, abundance of cyathias, nicer bracts, and long-lasting colors.

## **Temperature Control**

When you walk out of the store with your poinsettia, remember that the plant needs protection from the weather, especially if the temperature is cold, windy, or freezing. If the store did not provide a plant sleeve for your plant, ask them for one – even a grocery bag would be helpful. Your poinsettia should not be exposed (even in the wrapping) to freezing conditions for more than a short trip to the car. Do not leave your poinsettia in your car while you finish shopping. If the poinsettia is chilled, it may begin to dropleaves. Immediately unwrap your poinsettia when you arrive at your destination. Enjoy!!

## **At Home**

Locate your plant in a spot with bright natural light, but not exposed to direct sunlight for more than one to two hours. If in a sunny location, make sure that the plant never dries out. Do not plant your plant in an area that is exposed to drafts, heat from appliances, radiators, or ventilation ducts. Your poinsettia should be placed in an area not exposed to heavy traffic.

Although poinsettias are not poisonous, the plants should be placed away from young children and animals. Ingestion of the plant could cause discomfort if eaten.

### **Important**

If the poinsettia that you bring home has a pot cover or foil wrapper, pierce the bottom to allow proper drainage. Remember to place your plant on a waterproof container to catch the overflow when you water.

The soil should be kept moist. Do not let the soil dry out. Empty any water that drains into the container under your plant. If your plant sits in this water, the leaves will yellow and drop.

The color of your poinsettia will last longer with temperatures not over 75° F during the day and 60° F - 65° F at night.

### **How to Re-Flower Your Poinsettia**

If you are an enthusiastic Gardener, you may want to try to re-flower your poinsettia for next year's Holiday Season. Just remember 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.

**First Step - CARE** This Holiday Season - remember to take care of your plant (refer to the previous care tips). Do not let your plant dry out!

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

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

**May - FERTILIZE** Start fertilizing with a balanced (20/20/20 or 20/10/20 content of nitrogen/potassium/phosphorus) fertilizer at one teaspoon per gallon of water every third watering.

**Jun - RE-POT** Remove the plant, check to see if the plant needs re-potting (an abundance of white roots). If you do re-pot, use commercial potting soil and a little larger pot. The pot may be placed outside in light shade when the temperatures do not fall below 55° F or you can leave the plant inside. Fertilize with one teaspoon of a balanced fertilizer per gallon of water every second time you water.

**Mid-Aug - INSIDE CARE** The plant should be kept inside in direct sunlight. Cut the stems back again, this time to three to four leaves per shoot. Continue to water and fertilize.

**Mid-Sep to End of Nov** - The plant should stay in the direct sunlight (next to a window) until 5:00 PM. From 5:00 PM to 8:00 AM, the plant should be 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.

Now, you have your poinsettia to enjoy again for the new Holiday Season. But wait, you may be wondering, "Why doesn't it look like the plants in the stores?" Remember, that even though you have provided all the care your plant needs by following the directions outlined.... you cannot provide a commercial greenhouse environment. The commercial greenhouse offers an environment with controlled lighting, controlled temperatures, and professional growers.

This environment will most likely produce a larger, fuller plant than that which you could produce in your home. If you should decide to repeat the re-flowering process, your plant will be about 2 - 4 inches taller each year. Accordingly, cut back 2 - 4 inches higher every year and definitely re-pot into a larger pot.