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## PC-2 Poinsettia Care

### About Poinsettias

Poinsettias or *Euphorbia pulcherrima* are native to southern Mexico and Guatemala where they grow as a large shrub or small tree. They first were brought to the United States in 1825. The traditional Christmas flower has come a long way in the past twenty-five years. The extremely fragile early varieties were short-lived, dropping foliage and red bracts within a few days. Thanks to extensive research and breeding, today's poinsettias have stronger stems, larger bracts and better keeping qualities.

Since 1920, concerns about the poisonous nature of poinsettias have circulated. Ohio State University research on the poinsettia plant effectively disproved the charge that the poinsettia is harmful to human and animal health. The Poisindex® Information Service states that a 50-pound child would have to ingest over 500 bracts to surpass experimental doses: there was no toxicity at this level. The poinsettia, like all ornamental plants, is not intended for human and animal consumption.

### Temperature and Light

Poinsettias thrive in bright, sunny natural daylight. At least six hours of natural daylight is recommended. Keep out of direct sunlight to avoid fading of the bright red bracts. To prolong the color, temperatures should not exceed 70°F/21°C during the day or fall below 65°F/18°C at night. Avoid placing the plants near drafts, excessive heat and dry air from appliances, fireplaces or ventilating ducts.

### Water and Fertilizer

Poinsettias do best with a moist soil condition - not too wet and not too dry. Water thoroughly when the soil surface feels dry to a light touch. The best indication of a thorough watering is when water begins to seep through the drain holes at the bottom of the pot. Be sure to discard any excess water as plants left sitting in water may suffer from permanent root-rot damage.

It is not necessary to fertilize your poinsettias when they are in bloom during the holiday season. However, use of 10-5-10 wouldn't hurt and could help maintain the rich, green foliage color and promote new growth after the holidays.

### After the Holidays

At the end of March or early April when the bracts age and turn to a muddy green, cut the stems back to about half their length to encourage new growth. By the end of May, you will see vigorous new growth as the plant develops more lush green foliage. Keep the plants near a sunny window. You may place your plants outdoors once night temperatures are above 60°F. Protect or bring them in when temperatures drop. Poinsettias do best in a protected area, preferably along a south garden wall.

Around June 1, transplant the poinsettias into larger pots, about 2 to 4 inches bigger than the original pot. Use a soil mix with a good amount of organic matter. On or around July 4th, cut branches back again -- about half their length to encourage bushy plants. Continue to water the plants regularly during the growing period. Fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks throughout the spring, summer and fall months with a well-balanced, complete fertilizer such as **Grow More Sea Grow All Purpose Plant Food**.

### Reflowering

The poinsettia is a photoperiodic plant which means it begins to set buds and produce flowers as the winter nights become longer. The plants will naturally come into full bloom during November or December depending upon the flowering response time of the particular cultivar. This can be tricky to do outside of a controlled greenhouse environment because any stray artificial light such as that from a street light or a household lamp could delay or halt the reflowering of the plants.

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Starting October 1, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. Move plants to a dark room or place a large box over them. During this period, the plants require 6 to 8 hours of bright sunlight and night temperatures between 60°-70°F (15°-21°C). If the temperature is too high or too low, the setting of the flower buds may be delayed or halted.

The blooming process may also be delayed or disrupted by any stray light that shines near the plants during the critical darkness period. This regimen must continue for approximately 8 to 10 weeks in order for the plants to develop a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season. The reflowering process takes more than a little vigilance; perseverance and patience to be successful.

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