

The poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) belongs to the family Euphorbiaceae. This diverse family is made up of subtropical shrubs, leafless trees, and many succulents, including the very colorful “Crown of Thorns” and other interesting spiny succulents suitable for the indoor cactus garden. The showy colored parts we call “flowers” are actually bracts. The true flowers are the yellow portion in the center of the bracts.



History

The legendary Poinsettia is native to the area near present day Mexico. The Aztecs called the plant Cuetlaxochitl and cultivated it for red dye, made from the bracts, and a medicine to counteract fever, made from the latex. During the seventeenth century the Poinsettia was first used in nativity processions by the Franciscan priests who settled near Mexico. Poinsettias were first introduced into the United States in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, our first ambassador to Mexico. Poinsett, a botanist of great ability, distributed the Poinsettias to botanical gardens and to his horticultural friends, including John Bartram of Philadelphia. John Bartram gave Poinsettias to Robert Buist, a nursery man, who first sold the plant as *Euphorbia Poinsettia*. The name Poinsettia has remained the accepted name in the English speaking countries.

Another man instrumental in bringing us the Poinsettias was Albert Ecke. He began raising flowers, including Poinsettias, in California for the cut flower market. Later, the Eckes specialized in Poinsettias and developed many new varieties. White and pink Poinsettias are now available as well as new orange and marbled varieties.

Care

Keep Poinsettias in a bright to full sun spot in the home. They should be protected from cold drafts and excessive heat. The ideal temperature is 65-70° during the day, and 60° at night. Do not place on the top of the TV set (the set is hot when in use). Take Poinsettias out of the window at night if there is danger of chilling.

Check your Poinsettia daily to see if it needs water. Water thoroughly (until water runs out drainage hole) whenever the soil feels dry. If your pot is wrapped in foil, pierce the foil at the bottom for drainage. Never allow the pot to stand in water. Maintain soil moisture at moderate and uniform levels, neither soggy nor bone dry.

Reblooming

The Poinsettia is one of the most difficult holiday plants to re-bloom successfully. The procedure is both time-consuming and tricky. If you are determined to give it a try, here is a method to use: After your plant has finished blooming, set it in at least four hours of sun a day and continue to water and fertilize as needed. At the end of May, cut the plant back to about 1/3 its original size and sink the pot in a sunny garden outdoors. Rotate the pot about halfway each month so that the plant does not root into the ground. If you can't put the plant outside, keep it in a sunny window. Water as needed and fertilize regularly for the summer. Cut back by one-third in early August, repot if necessary, and continue fertilization. Bring your Poinsettia inside before the first of October, when you will start the 14-hour night regime. For approximately 8 weeks, the plant must have alternating periods of 14 hours uninterrupted darkness and 10 hours sunlight. After this treatment, the plant can be returned to its “normal” environment if the bracts have colored up well. Good luck, but don't be discouraged if your efforts result in a plant that is less than “florist quality.”



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