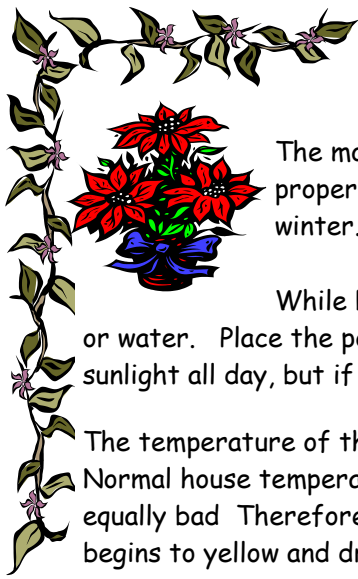


Poinsettia Care



The modern poinsettia with its larger and more colorful bracts has become a sturdy gift plant. With proper care these plants will continue to bloom for several months and can be made to rebloom each winter.

While blooming, the plants need an even environment with no drastic changes in temperature, light or water. Place the poinsettia near a bright window with plenty of sun. At this stage they don't need direct sunlight all day, but if it is too shaded, they will lose their bright color and become spindly and pale.

The temperature of the room should be 65-75°F during the day and slightly cooler, between 55-60°F at night. Normal house temperatures are usually fine. It is very important to avoid direct drafts—cold or hot drafts are equally bad. Therefore, avoid placing the plant near an open window, outside doors, woodstove, etc.. If the foliage begins to yellow and drop off, it may be an indication the plant has been exposed to too many drafts.

When watering, try to maintain even soil moisture. Water the plant thoroughly, using tepid water, until it leaks out of the bottom of the pot and then don't water again until the upper portion of the soil begins to dry out a little. There should be moisture further down in the soil. Watering in this manner will avoid severe drying out and waterlogged conditions. Always drain off excess water if the plant is left in the foil pot cover. Yellowing leaves may also indicate overwatering. Poinsettias appreciate a moist atmosphere. Placing them near other plants, lightly misting the foliage each day or placing them on top of a pebble-filled tray containing water will increase the humidity around the plant.

Plants cared for in this manner will remain bright and colorful for the entire winter, often lasting until Easter.

REBLOOMING YOUR POINSETTIA

Most people will dispose of their poinsettia when they begin to fade or when they grow tired of them, not realizing that with a little care they can enjoy the same plant year after year. Unfortunately, the colorful bracts are rarely as large and full as the first year, but there is a certain sense of pride and accomplishment from having your poinsettia reflower.

After blooming, the poinsettia goes into a semi-dormant state for a month or two. Reduce watering, allowing it to dry slightly between waterings and place it in a cooler and shadier location. The plant will drop most or all of its leaves and will look quite shabby. Don't worry, this is perfectly normal. When signs of new growth appear, cut the stems about halfway back and repot into a slightly larger container, using a good standard potting soil. Place it back into warmth and sunlight and resume normal watering. The plant will quickly grow. Begin fertilizing every two weeks with a good water-soluble fertilizer. In the spring when the weather becomes warm and settled, your poinsettia can be placed outside in a lightly shaded location. Often a summer outside will result in stronger and more vigorous growth. The plant should be pinched back several times during the growing season to encourage full and bushy growth. When the weather begins to cool in autumn, your plant will need to come back inside.

The poinsettia, like the Christmas cactus, is a short day plant. They require long nights of uninterrupted darkness to initiate the flowering response. Beginning about October 1st, your poinsettia will need to be placed in a dark closet or unused room or covered with a light proof bag to insure that it will have a 12-14 hour night. This must be done every night, without fail, or you'll have to start the whole process over. This procedure needs to be done for 4-6 weeks or until the plant shows signs of growing colored bracts. This is the most important step in reblooming your poinsettia. Failure to do so will result in few or no flowers.

This may be more fuss and bother than you care to deal with. Whether you choose to enjoy your poinsettia for a single winter or attempt to rebloom it, you have a wonderful plant that will brighten your holiday like no other.

