



Poinsettia Care

Christmas poinsettias are popular gifts and holiday decorations. But caring for them after the holidays are over seems to be something most people do not remember to do, and invariably, they are left out to be retrieved with the post-holiday trash pickup scheduling.

This does not have to be the untimely end for these beautiful plants, however. In fact, with the proper care and attention, poinsettias can live for many years, and if unencumbered by a terrible freeze, can attain heights of fifteen feet or more when planted in a landscape!

In their care requirements, they are rather straightforward, preferring bright indirect light, and quite a bit of it. Six hours of bright light every day is sufficient, however, they do not thrive on direct sunlight. If kept indoors, place them where they will receive diffused light such as near a window with thin curtains. They also prefer cooler daytime temperatures, so a normal household with fans or air-conditioning should do them well. If the temperature is too high, the plants will graciously respond by becoming tall and “leggy” in appearance. Avoid drafts and do not place them near heat sources such as heaters, radiators, or working fireplaces.

Like most household-type plants, poinsettias prefer soil that is slightly moist but not wet. Well-drained soil is best for them, for they resent standing in water and will suffer from root rot if water is allowed to stand at the plant’s base. Soil that is dry to the touch one inch from top indicates it is time to water them, as would drooping bracts or leaves.

The beautiful red, pink, white or variegated bracts of the poinsettia are what appear to be the plant’s flowers. They are in fact merely glorified leaves, and they can remain beautiful for weeks at a time and can reappear each year if proper care is given to the poinsettia plant. Once the bracts lose their color, near spring’s arrival, cut the plant back to approximately seven to nine inches in height. Within a month or so, new growth will appear. At this time, begin to fertilize every month with a weak mixture of commercial fertilizer. Keep the plant pruned all throughout the summer to ensure the plant remains compact, but do not prune after August 31. Continue to keep the plant watered properly and provide indirect lighting all year round. Poinsettia bracts recolor as the nights in autumn begin to get longer. Place the plant where it can enjoy these longer nights remembering that exposure at this time to too much light will inhibit the plant’s natural tendency to put on colorful bracts, and will remain green.

Once a year, repot your poinsettia in a good quality potting soil. This is best done after pruning and just before the new growth appears.

By following these easy directions, you can have a beautiful plant that renews its holiday beauty year to year!