

POINSETTIA

THE SYMBOLIC FLOWER FOR CHRISTMAS

Light. Poinsettias would prefer to be in bright, indirect light, although a temporary home as a centerpiece on a table, if watered properly, should not cause harm. If placed near a window, make sure that no part of the plant touches the cold window pane.

Water. Proper watering is crucial for poinsettias. Allow the poinsettia to dry down on the surface and water thoroughly. They cannot tolerate soggy soil or sitting in water so always dump saucers after watering and make sure decorative foil pot cover has a drain.

Temperature. To keep the plant blooming, keep the poinsettia at 65-70 degrees. Colder temperatures can cause leaf drop. Do not place plant near drafts, such as a front door or heat vent.

Reflowering. Poinsettias can reflower the following Christmas, but unless a year long schedule of care is observed, the results are not great. Here are the steps if you want to give it a try.

In the middle of May, cut the stems back to about 4 inches above the soil, and replant in a pot 1 to 2 inches larger in diameter. Put the plant near the window that is exposed to the most sunlight. Keep the plant at a temperature of 65 to 75 degrees F and water when the surface of the soil is dry to touch. After new growth appears, fertilize every two weeks with a water soluble fertilizer at the rate recommended on the label for flowering plants. In early June, move it outdoors to a shady spot. Continue watering and fertilizing the plant while it is outdoors. Pinch each stem (remove 1 inch of terminal growth) in early July. Then, between August 15 and September 1, cut or pinch the new stems back, allowing three or four leaves to remain on each shoot. After this second pinch, bring the plant indoors and again place it near a window with a sunny exposure. If the plant is not pinched, it will grow too tall and be unsightly. Keep the plant at a temperature of 65 to 70 degrees F at night and continue watering and fertilizing. Poinsettias are short-day plants, which mean they flower about 10 weeks after daylight shortens to about 12 hours or less. Therefore, to have the plant in full flower by Christmas, keep it in complete darkness between 5pm and 8am from the first part of October until Thanksgiving. During this period, any kind of light exposure between 5pm and 8am will delay flowering. A closet, opaque box or opaque cloth will keep the plant in darkness during those hours. Remember to put the plant near a sunny window in the daytime. Continue fertilizing the plant until mid-December.

And this Christmas when someone brings up that old dogma of poinsettias being poisonous (a story that been around since 1918) refer them to the research conducted at Ohio State University that proved the old wives' tale to be false.



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