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Poinsettia Care and Information

One of the most delightful decorations at Christmas is the Poinsettia. The most popular color choice is the deep, vibrant red. However, there is a wide array of color choices, including pink, white, marbled, speckled, and purple. The colorful parts of the poinsettia, the bracts, are actually modified leaves. The poinsettia flower is small, green or yellow, and situated in the middle of the bracts.

How to Select a Beautiful Poinsettia

***Bract Color** - Choose plants with thoroughly colored and expanded bracts. Avoid plants with too much green around the bract edges, as this is a sign of a plant shipped before it was sufficiently mature. Look for plants with dense, plentiful foliage all the way to the soil line. An abundance or rich green foliage is a vital sign of good plant health.

***Durability and Freshness** - Select plants with stiff stems, good bract retention and no signs of wilting. Be wary of plants displayed in paper, plastic or mesh sleeves, or plants that are too closely crowded in a sales display. A poinsettia needs its space, and the longer a plant remains sleeved, the more the plant quality will deteriorate. Crowding can reduce air flow around the plants and cause premature bract loss or other problems. Examine the plant's soil: it's best to avoid waterlogged soil, particularly if the plant appears wilted, such a condition could signify irreversible root rot. When transporting the plant, protect it from chilling winds and temperatures below 50 degrees F.

Here are the Do's of Poinsettia Care

- ❖ DO place your plant in indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day. If direct sun can't be avoided, diffuse the light with a shade or sheer curtain.
- ❖ DO provide room temperatures between 68-70 degrees F. Generally speaking, if you are comfortable, so is your poinsettia.
- ❖ DO water your plant when the soil feels dry to the touch.
- ❖ DO use a large, roomy shopping bag to protect your plant when transporting.

- ❖ DO fertilize your plant AFTER THE BLOOMING SEASON with a balanced, all-purpose fertilizer.

Here are the Don'ts of Poinsettia Care

- ❖ DON'T place plants near cold drafts or excessive heat. Avoid placing plants near appliances, fireplaces or ventilating ducts or the top of a television set.
- ❖ DON'T expose plants to temperatures below 50 degrees F. Poinsettias are very sensitive to cold, so avoid placing them outside during the winter months.
- ❖ DON'T over water your plant, or allow it to sit in standing water. Always remove a plant from any decorative container before watering, and allow the water to drain completely.
- ❖ DON'T fertilize your plant when it is in bloom.

How to Re-Bloom your Poinsettia

When the poinsettia's bracts age and lose their aesthetic appeal, there is no reason to throw it out. With proper care, dedication and a certain amount of luck, you too can re-bloom your poinsettia!

*By late March or early April, cut your poinsettia back to about 8" in height, continue a regular watering program, and fertilize your plant with a good, balanced all-purpose fertilizer. By the end of May, you should see vigorous new growth.

*Place your plants outdoors, in the shade, where they can bask in the warmth of spring and summer, bringing indoors if we have a chance of 50 degrees F or colder.

Continue regular watering during the growth period, and fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks.

*Pruning may be required during the summer to keep plants bushy and compact. Late June to early July is a good time for this step, but be sure not to prune your plant later than September 1st. Keep the plants in indirect sun and water regularly.

*Around June 1st, you may transplant your poinsettia into a larger pot. Select a pot no more than 4" larger than the original pot. An indoor soil mix, like Gardner's Gold Potting Soil, is recommended.

*The poinsettia is a photo periodic plant, meaning that it sets bud and produces flowers as the Autumn nights lengthen. Poinsettias will naturally come into bloom during November or December, depending on the flowering response time of the individual cultivar. Timing to produce blooms for the Christmas holiday can be difficult outside of the controlled environment of a greenhouse. Stray light OF ANY KIND, such as from a street light or household lamps, could delay or entirely halt the re-flowering process.

*Starting October 1st, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. Accomplish this by moving the plants to a totally dark room, or by covering them overnight with a large box. During October, November and early

December, poinsettias require 6-8 hours of bright sunlight daily, with night temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F. Temperatures outside of this range could also delay flowering. Continue the normal watering and fertilizer program. Carefully following this regime for 8 to 10 weeks should result in a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season.

The Poinsettia is NOT Poisonous

The widespread belief that poinsettias are poisonous is a misconception. The scientific evidence demonstrating the poinsettia's safety is ample and well documented. Studies conducted by The Ohio State University in cooperation with the Society of American Florists concluded that no toxicity was evident at experimental ingestion levels far exceeding those likely to occur in a home environment. In fact, the POISENDEX Information Service, the primary information resource used by most poison control centers, states that a 50 pound child would have to ingest over 500 poinsettia bracts to surpass experimental doses. Yet even at this high level, no toxicity was demonstrated. As with all ornamental plants, poinsettias are not intended for human or animal consumption, and certain individuals may experience an allergic reaction to poinsettias. However, the poinsettia has been demonstrated to be a safe plant. In fact, in 1992, the poinsettia was included on the list of houseplants most helpful in removing pollutants from indoor air.