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## **POINSETTIA CARE**

Poinsettias are native to Mexico and Central America, where they grow in the warm weather to become shrubs up to ten feet tall. The large red blooms are actually whorls of red bracts (leaf-like structures); the true flowers are the small yellow to green, button like objects in the center of the red bracts. Poinsettias are available in several shades of red, pink, white and variegated or marbled colours.

Careful selection and care will help to ensure that your plant looks good through the entire holiday season. When purchasing a poinsettia, you should look for a few things that are important facts in the health and longevity of your plant life. First you should avoid plants with wilted foliage, or few or no leaves on the bottom of the plant. Make sure there are no broken branches, (check for any whitish milk-like sap dripping from the plant as this will indicate something has been broken) as one branch can mean half the plant can be destroyed, and you will be left with an ugly plant. One fact that I feel is one of the most important is that the small yellow flowers in the center of the bracts should still be closed tight, as this will mean they have not yet come into full bloom.

Before leaving the store with your poinsettia, make sure a plant sleeve or wrap is put around the plant to protect it from the cold outdoor temperatures. Just a brief moment in freezing temperatures can cause the leaves to blacken and drop.

When you get home take the sleeve or wrap off and place the plant near a sunny window or other well-lighted area. Do not allow the plants leaves to touch the cold windowpane and keep them away from cold drafts or heat outlets. Poinsettias prefer temperatures between 60 – 70 degrees F. If your plant has been wrapped with a decorative foil, then make sure to punch a hole in the bottom for drainage. Leaves may wilt if the plant is too dry, too wet or exposed to a draft. If the leaves are yellowing, this is a sign that the plant is not getting enough light, over-watering or lack of nitrogen.

Fertilize with a complete water-soluble fertilizer once a week until plant has finished blooming. Check your plant daily to see if watering is needed, when soil is dry to the touch, water until it freely flows out the bottom of the pot.

***Never let your poinsettias stand in water.***

After blooming, the plant matures and the bracts and leaves will fall off. If you wish to continue growing your plant, you can treat it like a houseplant or cut the plant back to about 6", reduce watering and discontinue fertilizing, and store it in a cool dark place.

In the spring you may want to put your plant outside for the summer to grow, at this point water and fertilize like other annual flowers. Bring your poinsettias back indoors as soon as the nights grow cool.

To initiate flower buds for the following Christmas, in early October start giving the plant uninterrupted darkness from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. This can be achieved by putting the plant in a closet, cardboard box or cover with a black plastic garbage bag. Continue these long nights until early December. After the red colour bracts start to appear and then become enlarged and fully coloured, bring the plant in to full sunlight, water and fertilizer as stated above.