



Poinsettia Care

- Poinsettias don't like cold temperatures. Protect your holiday plants on the way home from the nursery, then place them where they'll get indirect sunlight at least six hours a day. In direct sun, diffuse the light with a sheer curtain or shade. Ideal temperatures should not exceed 70 degrees in the daytime, nor go much below 55 degrees at night. It is recommended not to put plants near heat sources, such as appliances or working fireplaces. Keep them away from drafts, such as ventilating ducts.
- Water your poinsettias when the soil is dry to the touch, but never let them sit in water. Fertilizing should not be done while the plant is in bloom. (If you plan to keep the poinsettia until next year, see below, use an all-purpose fertilizer after the blooming season.)
- Contrary to popular myth, poinsettias are not considered poisonous. But no holiday houseplants or decorations should be left where small children or pets can get to them.

Poinsettia Redux

How to make sure this year's plants will re-bloom next December

1. In March, or early April, prune the plant back to about 8 inches in height. Three or four green leaves should remain on each shoot. Prune off any remaining colored bracts. (What look like flower petals are actually bracts. The real flowers are the yellow berrylike clusters in the center.) Keep the plant in your sunniest window, water it regularly, and feed it with diluted fish emulsion or kelp extract every two weeks from now until fall.
2. In June, transplant the poinsettia into a pot 2 to 4 inches bigger than the present one. You can keep it indoors, but the plant will grow more vigorously if you put it outdoors in full sun. Or you can plant it directly into the garden in a sheltered place if you live in an area where nights consistently stay above 50 degrees year-round. Poinsettias need soil rich in organic matter, such as compost or leaf mold. Every third week or so, pinch the shoots back to two or three fully grown leaves. Do this until mid-August. Then bring the plant indoors before night temperatures drop below 55 degrees. Put it where it will receive at least six hours of sun and cut back on fertilizing for now.
3. Now here's the tough part: Poinsettias won't flower unless they are kept in total darkness for 14 continuous hours per night for 8 to 10 weeks. Even momentary exposure to a streetlight or flashlight can delay or inhibit flowering completely. Starting October 1, keep the plant in a closet or an unused room at night or cover it with a box or heavy paper bag. The plant should stay in the dark from 5pm to 8am. Nighttime temperatures shouldn't fall below 60 degrees. From 8am to 5pm, it will need full sunlight, with daytime temperatures around 70 to 75 degrees. Keep watering and begin the feeding schedule again. After 8 to 10 weeks, the bracts should be flushed with color.

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