A close-up photograph of a poinsettia plant. The leaves are a vibrant, deep red color with prominent veins. In the center, there is a cluster of small, green, unopened flower buds. The background is dark, making the red leaves stand out.

FBMG Help Desk Question of the Week

Every year I get the most amazing Poinsettia only to have it perish. What can I do to keep it healthy?

Lets take a look...

History of the Poinsettia

For nearly 200 years, this winter beauty has graced homes throughout the US



Poinsettias have a long history in the Western hemisphere. The poinsettia was first introduced into the United States in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, who was the U.S. ambassador to Mexico at the time.

The ancient Aztec Indians of Mexico had originally cultivated this plant that they called *cuetlaxochitl* which means “mortal flower that perishes and withers like all that is pure.”

Poinsett, himself being a botanist of great ability, arranged to have plants sent to his home in Greenville, South Carolina and also distributed plants to various botanical gardens and to some horticultural friends.



The modern poinsettia industry was pioneered and developed by the Ecke family, who began field growing poinsettias in the Hollywood and Beverly Hills area. The Paul Ecke Ranch still operates in Encinitas, California and is the major producer of poinsettia mother plants used for cuttings by commercial growers.

How To Select Your Poinsettia

Some Simple Signs of a Healthy Plant



What To Look For:

- Healthy poinsettias typically exhibit dark green foliage and brightly colored bracts (the red, white or ivory leaves).
- Pull back the plastic sleeve and inspect the lower leaves for signs of discoloration.
- Signs of proper watering and new growth in the cyathia (see below).

What To Avoid:

- Plants that have dropped their leaves, are wilted, or have faded, torn, or discolored bracts.
- Avoid plants with the absence of the true flowers or cyathia (the small, round, yellow parts located in the center of the bracts) As the plant ages, the cyathia typically drop.
- Since poinsettias are tropical plants, temperatures below 50°F will cause chilling injury. The “selling” establishment should sleeve or cover the plant when the plants could be exposed to temperatures below 50°F. A chilling injury is indicated by blue or white bract discoloration, or excessive leaf drop.



Be sure to check the plant for insects, mold or mildew

How To Care For Your Poinsettia

Keeping Your Poinsettia Happy

As with most plants, attention to proper amounts of light, water, and fertilizer along with providing a proper temperature will promote a healthy and happy plant



- *Indoor light: Put in a south, east or west window where the plant will receive bright daylight.*
- *Indoor temperatures of 65-70 degrees F is ideal. Temperature fluctuation may be cause drying. Avoid locations that are prone to cold drafts, near heat ducts, fireplaces, fans, space heaters, etc. Poinsettias will suffer damage if they are exposed to temperatures below 50 degrees F.*
- *Moisture: Keep soil moist, only water when the soil surface feels dry to the touch*
- *Fertilize: You **do not** need to fertilize your poinsettia during the holidays. After the holidays, start fertilizing your plant when you see new growth (new green leaves, stems, bracts).*

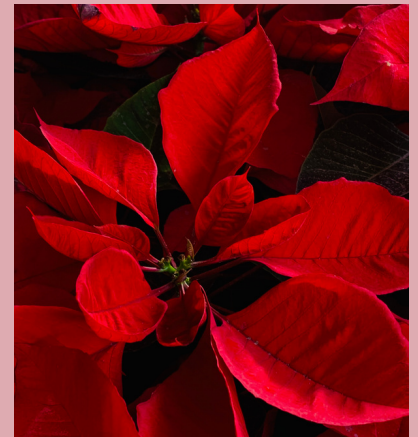
How To Re-Bloom Your Poinsettia

While it takes some effort, it can be accomplished



After the holiday blooms have past, you can keep your poinsettia as a green houseplant all year long. While not an easy task, forcing the plant to rebloom requires excluding light from the plant for a period of time while keeping the plant healthy. The reduction in light prevents the plant from producing chlorophyll, the pigment that makes plant parts green. This changes the bracts to red, pink or white, depending on the poinsettia variety.

This of course can be done at any time of the year, but for your plant to rebloom in time for Christmas, it needs to be in complete darkness from evening till dawn beginning in late September until the bracts develop good color, usually in early or mid-December. During the day, put it back in the sunny window. Keep up this routine until the desired bract colors are almost restored. Try to make sure the plant doesn't experience temperatures below 60 or above 70° F. Nighttime temperatures above 70 to 75° F may delay or prevent flowering.



With a little attention, you can keep yours going for years to come.

Can My Poinsettia Go Outside?

Generally not as a bedding plant, but in containers they have been quite successful.

Transplanting your poinsettia into a patio or landscape container has been successful in most parts of Texas. Select pots no more than 4 inches larger than the original inner pot. A soil mix with a considerable amount of organic matter, such as peat moss or leaf mold is highly recommended. Be sure to keep the container mobile and easy to move indoors if needed to protect from chill.



There are rumors of people successfully growing poinsettias in the ground. If you are lucky enough to live in an area where the overnight temperatures don't get below 55 degrees F you could try it as an experiment. If you do, be sure to properly mulch and protect the plant from the winds.

Poinsettia Trivia

Amaze your friends and family with your knowledge about this beautiful plant!

Do you know what day it is?

If it is December 12th, it is National Poinsettia Day!

- The beautiful red (or other color) that poinsettias are coveted for are actually the leaves. The flowers are actually the clusters of yellow in the center and the green are the buds.
- There are over 100 varieties and colors available.
- The Aztecs used the red leaves to dye fabric.
- Close to 80 million of these popular house plants are sold each year.
- Poinsettias in some parts of the world can actually grow 12 feet or more and are small trees.
- They belong to the spurge family, (*Euphorbiaceae*)
- According to multiple poison control centers the poinsettia is not poisonous. The latex like sap however can be an irritant to the skin.



***Do you have questions
about your home
landscape and plants?***

***Contact the Fort Bend
Master Gardener Help Desk***

***Email:
FortBendmg@ag.tamu.edu***

***Phone:
281-341-7068***

***The Help Desk is manned
Monday thru Friday,
9am-Noon***

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