

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 1

Poinsettia

History

In 1829, after four years of serving as the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett returned to his home in South Carolina. With him he brought cuttings of a beautiful Mexican wildflower, which we now know as the poinsettia.

The plants that grew from these cuttings were tall shrubs with a tendency to drop their lower leaves, leaving the plant's colourful flowers sitting at the top of several bare stems.

In 1963, a mutation of the plant was discovered. This mutation was smaller than the average poinsettia and held on to its leaves. This plant was propagated and used in breeding programs. Its genetic characteristics were passed on to the plants that are today's well-recognized symbols of Christmas.

Light

Your poinsettia will need plenty of light in your home. Place it in a bright room near a sunny window.

Temperature

To keep your poinsettia healthy, keep it at a temperature of 65 to 70E F. (16 to 20E C.) during the day, and move it to a slightly cooler room or lower the temperature to around 60E F. (15 to 16E C.) at night.

Keep your poinsettia out of draughts, and make sure that the leaves are not touching a cold window pane, as such extremes in temperature may cause the plant to drop its leaves.

Watering

Check the soil daily. When it is dry to the touch, add water until it runs out of the drainage holes in the bottom of the pot. If you have placed your poinsettia in a decorative pot or foil wrapper, be sure to drain any water that collects in it. Don't leave your poinsettia standing in water as overly wet soil can lead to root rot.

Reblooming

Although most people choose to add their poinsettia to the compost pile at the end of the holiday season, with timing and patience it is possible to get your plant to bloom again. When the flowers (which are actually bracts, or coloured leaves) fade, cut the plant back to half its size to encourage new growth. Each new shoot will produce a new bract.

Place the plant in a sunny window. Keep it well watered, and feed it regularly with 20-20-20 fertilizer.

In the spring, when all danger of frost is past, again cut the poinsettia back by one third, and place it outdoors in light shade. The plant can stay there for the summer. Bring it in when the cool fall weather arrives.

Starting at the beginning of October, keep your poinsettia in complete darkness between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. every day. Continue this schedule until mid November. Remember that any interruption in the routine will delay flowering. By Christmas, your poinsettia should be blooming again.

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