

The Basics of Poinsettia Plants

Although poinsettias are most often associated with the holiday season, they are actually tropical plants. In spite of their origins, poinsettias can thrive during the holiday season and even last long after the holidays have come and gone.

Poinsettias are native to Mexico and Central America. Aztecs called the plant *cuetlaxochitl*. The flowering plant was first introduced to the United States by Joel Poinsett, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, and was subsequently renamed the poinsettia. The flowers of the poinsettia are actually the yellow blooms at the middle of the bright red or white bracts that form on the plant. Perhaps due to the bright red of the bracts, the plant quickly became a popular Christmas plant.

It's important to note that poinsettias grow in a warm climate and therefore must be kept in tropical conditions to ensure the plant's

health. Furthermore, poinsettias bloom in response to shortening daylight hours. That means they will need ample darkness each night in order to simulate the dark nights of short, winter days. To achieve this, you may need to put the plant into a dark closet for 12 to 14 hours each night.

During the day, the plant should be in a sunny window where it will have access to bright light. The more light the better. Keep the soil evenly moist. Misting the plant will help it to retain some humidity. Also, fill the overflow saucer on your flower pot with gravel to allow water seeping through the pot to evaporate from the gravel. Hot temperatures indoors combined with high humidity will help the plant to thrive. Even one day without

adequate moisture can cause the leaves to drop. Furthermore, decreasing temperatures can cause leaves to fall off. The goal is to keep the indoor temperature consistent.

While many poinsettia plants are discarded after the holiday season, these plants can actually be cut back and saved for next season. Trimming back any remaining leaves and continuing to care for the plant by keeping it moist can help. To force the blooms next season, start reducing the plant's exposure to sunlight in mid-September to October. Again, this will mean removing the plant to an area that is shrouded in complete darkness. Even streetlights or indoor lighting can affect blooming. If the plant does not begin to turn color before the holiday season, you may need to purchase a new plant and try again next year.



■ Metro Creative Connection

In Your Time Of Need... We'll Be Here For You

• Traditional Services • Cremation Services • Prearrangement Planning



Tami Keller
Funeral Director



Funeral Home & Crematory, Yankton
Memorial Resource Center, Tyndall • Memorial Chapels, Tyndall, Tabor & Menno
665-9679 • 1-800-495-9679 • www.opsahl-kostelfuneralhome.com