



### **Keep Gift Plants Under Wraps**

A holiday plant can be the perfect gift for many occasions, but to ensure a beautiful, healthy plant use care when selecting and transporting your gift.

### **Selection**

When choosing a poinsettia, look for a full, well-branched plant with good color development in the showy bracts and dark green leaves. A fresh poinsettia will have little or no yellow pollen showing on the true flowers, a small cluster of round yellowish buds in the center of the colorful bracts.

Other types of holiday gift plants should also have deep green colored foliage, with no dying or off-color leaves. Avoid plants with wilted foliage, or those with few leaves at the base, which can indicate health problems.

Also avoid plants if small white gnats fly up out of foliage when the plant is touched. Or if white gnats are found on the undersides of the leaves. These insects, called whiteflies, are a common greenhouse pest of poinsettia and other holiday plants. Once in your home they will fly and infest other houseplants, particularly tropical hibiscus. And they are very difficult to control, so don't bring them into your home.

However, don't confuse droplets of white milky sap that may be found on poinsettia stems or leaves with whiteflies. Poinsettias are in the Euphoria family and normally have white, milking sap.

Do not choose a plant that is displayed inside a paper or plastic sleeve that reaches above the top foliage. Although the plant should be placed in a sleeve before it's taken home to protect the branches from being broken, plants allowed to remain in the sleeve for a long period of time often experience yellowing and dropping of the lower leaves due to ethylene buildup around the foliage.

### **Transporting Plants Home**

Holiday plants have been growing in a warm greenhouse before arriving at the store, and they are sensitive to cold temperatures. Poinsettias and other holiday plants can be damaged by temperatures below 50° F.

So whether you buy a plant from a greenhouse or florist, or are giving a plant you've grown yourself, make sure it's wrapped in several layers of paper with some dead air space between the layers before you take the plant outdoors. The final layer might be a heavy grocery sack or cardboard box.



Rush the plant from the shop or greenhouse to your heated car. If your shopping trip includes other stops, make them first, so plants don't sit in a cold car and get chilled. When it's time to take plants from the car, again move them quickly.

### Give Them Extra Light

Any plant going from a brightly lit greenhouse or shop into the dry, low-light environment of a typical home in December will have some adjustments to make. To minimize the shock, tell your gardening friend to select a spot for the plant providing plenty of light and a minimum of drafts or temperature fluctuations. If necessary, supplemental lighting may be needed for the plant to do its best.

Be sure, too, that you give care instructions along with the plant so the recipient can care for it properly to keep it healthy.

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