



Poinsettias

Few plants spark thoughts of the holidays like the poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*). This beautiful plant is everywhere this time of year, and for good reason. When it's cold and dreary outside, it's nice to have the poinsettia's large splashes of color indoors.

Poinsettias are native to Mexico, where they can grow to be a large shrub, often reaching heights of up to 10 feet. The colorful part of poinsettias, what is often mistakenly called the flowers, are actually modified leaves known as bracts. The true flowers are the small little yellow and green structures in the center of the plant.

Here are some tips for poinsettia care and maintenance:

Poinsettias are very sensitive to cold drafts or drastic temperature changes. If transporting a poinsettia from somewhere warm like the greenhouse to your home, keep the poinsettia covered with a towel, or a plastic bag if the outside temperatures are significantly lower than those of the greenhouse.

Once you have your poinsettia home, put it in a spot that receives bright light and make sure it does not touch any cold windows.

Many poinsettias are shipped or sold in plastic sleeves. Remove these as soon as possible. A common gas, ethylene (the gas responsible for fruit ripening) can build up in the sleeve and cause the plant's leaves to curl or drop.

Keep the soil just barely moist and make sure the container drains well.

Fertilize your poinsettia roughly every 10 days with a common fertilizer.

Poinsettias are a member of the Euphorbia family. All members of the family, including poinsettias, produce a milky sap that can be irritating if it comes into contact with skin. Some members of the family are poisonous, but the poinsettia is not among them. While it is not wise to test scientific findings on your own, and eating plants with an unknown effect on you is never recommended, studies have shown that an average adult would have to eat roughly 500 poinsettia leaves (or bracts) to become sick.

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