

## Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore County

*December 20, 2023*

### **Poinsettias**

With Christmas nearly here, this week I decided to share an article from our Extension Horticulturalist, Nicole Stoner on poinsettias.

A common holiday gift is the Poinsettia. If you receive one for Christmas this year, do you know how to care for it? Poinsettias are a staple for the Christmas season, but they don't have to be a short-lived gift that is thrown away at the beginning of the year. Typically, poinsettias are most commonly found in red, but the color range is constantly expanding. They can now be found in white, pink, green, peach, yellow or marbled or speckled colors. On an old-fashioned poinsettia, the red colored portion of the poinsettia is not the flower of the plant. The colored, leaf-like structures are called bracts, which are just modified leaves. The true flower of a poinsettia is the yellow center of the colored bracts.

Poinsettias need to be cared for during transport in addition to regular care. When you first purchase a poinsettia, you need to protect it as you transport it. Wrap it in a plastic bag when you take it outside to protect the plant from the cold, windy outdoor conditions. This should be done when you leave the store, when you move it from your car to your home, and if you take it to another house as a gift. Remove that plastic bag each time it gets to the house. Once in its permanent location, remove the decorative foil wrapping from the pot of the plant. This foil can hold onto water for the plant, but in a bad way. It can make it so that the plant roots are constantly wet and root rot can occur.

The care of a poinsettia can be fairly easy. Water the plant when the soil becomes dry to the touch, but don't wait until the plant wilts prior to watering again either. Place poinsettias where they will get indirect light for 6 hours a day. Keep the plant away from cold drafts and keep them from touching a window. This plant prefers temperatures of 60-70 degrees F during the day and 55 degrees F overnight. Avoid fertilization during the flowering period but fertilize monthly with a houseplant fertilizer during the rest of the growing season.

You can keep poinsettias year-round rather than discarding at the end of the Holiday season. After Christmas, grow the poinsettia like you would any other houseplant. Keep it evenly moist and in bright, indirect light. In February or March, cut back the plant to 4-6 inches in height. In May, repot into a larger pot. It can be placed outdoors in spring after frost. In the fall, bring the poinsettia indoors before night temperatures drop below 55-60 degrees F.

Poinsettias will flower after being induced by a photoperiod, like Christmas Cactus. It takes at least 12 hours of darkness per night to initiate flowering. Starting at the end of September, place the poinsettia in a closet or cover it with a box to keep it in total darkness from 5pm until 8am



# EXTENSION



daily. Even the lights in our homes can interfere with the flowering cycle, so it needs to be completely dark around the plant. Once flowering begins, in mid-December, you may discontinue the daily dark period. It will help if you continue this until the bracts are fully expanded. Then, you can enjoy your poinsettia through the holiday season for years to come.

Wishing you and yours a Happy Holiday season!