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What You Should Know About Poinsettias

Poinsettias are one of our most beloved houseplants around Christmas-time, but how to care for them is a mystery to many folks. Here is what you should know in order to keep beautiful poinsettias.

Poinsettias Are NOT poisonous.

There is the perception that poinsettias are poisonous and should not be kept around small children. This is simply not true. They may not taste good, but the most a child eating a poinsettia leaf should expect is an upset tummy. In animal toxicity tests, animals fed the equivalent of 500 leaves (for a 50-lb child) were just fine.

How do I keep my poinsettia looking good?

Poinsettias prefer a moderate amount of light. Place them in bright natural light in your home or office. North facing windows will not provide enough sun during the holiday season.

Since poinsettias are sensitive to cold, they should not be placed near a door, drafty window, or in any cold area. When purchasing poinsettias on a cold day, make sure to take them straight home and don't let them become chilled. Temperatures below 55 degrees aren't good for them.

Poinsettias like to stay right in the middle range of soil moisture - neither drenched nor bone dry. When watering, it is best to remove the decorative foil hat and water the plant over the sink. Water directly in to the soil so the foliage doesn't get wet, and allow the plant to finish dripping before placing it back in the desired location. Foil hats are nice to dress the poinsettia for gift giving, and they generally keep water off your furniture, but they aren't suitable as long term saucers for your plants. If you want to keep the decorative hat on the plant, cut a hole in the bottom of it and place the plant, hat and all, in a normal saucer so you can see that the plant is not sitting in water.

How do I keep my poinsettia from year to year and make it re-bloom?

Keep the plant indoors in bright, indirect light until warmer temperatures roll around. Once the night temperatures stay consistently above 55 degrees, move your plant outside and transplant it into a larger pot with our Covington's potting soil. In late March, cut the poinsettia back to roughly 8 inches tall and immediately feed it with a 20-20-20 water soluble fertilizer. Continue to fertilize with that same fertilizer every two weeks. You'll see vigorous new growth by early May. Prune the poinsettia occasionally to keep it bushy and full, and keep the plant in a location with bright indirect light (no direct sun).

The complicated part comes in early October! Poinsettias require 14 hours of total darkness to set blooms. Every day from October 1 on, put your poinsettia outside in the normal spot for exactly ten hours, and then move it inside to a dark closet for the other 14 hours. Greenhouse growers spend a lot of time doing this with enormous sheets of blackout plastic! Be sure to move your poinsettia back indoors when outside temperatures begin to dip close to 55 degrees.

Repeat this process so your poinsettia receives 14 hours of darkness and 10 hours of light every single day for ten weeks and you'll have blooms for Christmas!