

To initiate short days the plant must be in complete darkness from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., which can be accomplished by placing the plant in a dark closet or in a light-proof box. Any light that is received during the dark period can delay flowering.

Light is still needed for growth, so the plant should be placed in a sunny location from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Water as needed and fertilize every week according to the fertilizer label until bract color develops.

Once color is visible, it is not necessary to keep the poinsettia in complete darkness during the night. At this time, the plant flowers with any amount of daylight.

### Directions at a Glance

Being able to rebloom poinsettias for several years is a great accomplishment. Use the following schedule as a reminder.

**May:** Cut back stems to 3–6 inches above the soil. Repot or separate if needed. Place in sunny window and water when soil is dry to touch. (Root cuttings if desired.)

**June:** Move plant outside. Water and fertilize more frequently as plant grows.

**July 1:** First pinch.

**August 15:** Second pinch.

**September 1:** Bring plant indoors to sunny location at 65 to 75°F.

**October:** Initiate short days (for mid-December bloom date). Water as needed and fertilize weekly according to label.

### Poinsettia Cultivars

Several series of cultivars offer a variety of bract colors. Unique cultivars not necessarily associated with a series include the following.

Cultivar	Bract Colors
Candy Cane	White with rose flecks
Carousel	Red, twisted bracts
Christmas Feelings	Fringed pink and cream
Cinnamon Star	Peachy-pink and cream
Cranberry Punch	Bright pink/red
Holly Point	Red with variegated leaves
Jingle Bells	Red with pink spots
Lemon Drop	Pale yellow
Marble	White and pink areas
Mars Pink	Light and dark pink
Monet	Blend of cream, rose, and pink
Plum Pudding	Dark red-purple
Winter Rose	Crimped bracts in various colors; shaped like roses

For more information, contact an Iowa State University Extension county office or visit these Web sites:

ISU Extension publications—  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/store](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store)

ISU Horticulture—  
[www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)

Reiman Gardens—  
[www.reimangardens.iastate.edu](http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu)

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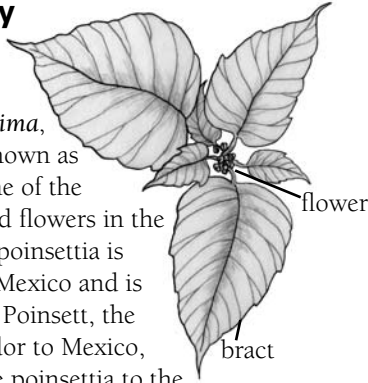
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# Poinsettia Care



## A Brief History of the Poinsettia

*Euphorbia pulcherrima*, more commonly known as the poinsettia, is one of the most popular potted flowers in the United States. The poinsettia is native to southern Mexico and is named after Joel R. Poinsett, the first U. S. ambassador to Mexico, who introduced the poinsettia to the U.S. in 1825. Today, it is likely that at least one poinsettia can be found in nearly every household and business during the December holiday season.



## Poisonous Plant?

Poinsettias have been accused of being toxic. However, laboratory studies have shown that the leaves, stems, bracts, and flowers are not toxic to people or pets.

## Plant Selection

Select plants with large, brightly colored bracts (showy petal-like leaves) that are not wilted, broken, or damaged, and a full complement of rich, dark green leaves. Healthy leaves should be present even at the base of the plant.

The true flowers are the yellowish button-like structures in the center of the bracts. Avoid plants where the true flowers are shedding pollen or falling off. Bracts normally do not last for long periods after the true flowers fade.

Inspect poinsettias for insect pests. These uninvited guests tend to stick around long after the holidays.

Carefully wrap plants before taking them outdoors. Brief exposures to cold temperatures can cause the leaves and bracts to drop.

## Plant Care during the Holidays

When poinsettias reach their final destination, unwrap plants carefully and place them in a sunny location away from cold drafts or heat sources. Temperatures between 60 and 70°F are best.

Check the soil daily to determine whether the plant needs water. When the soil is dry to the touch, water the plant thoroughly. Water should flow freely out the bottom of the pot. Discard the excess water. Plant root systems can be damaged by sitting for long periods in saucers full of water. Bracts should remain attractive indoors through the holiday season and often until Valentine's Day.

## Spring and Summer Care

Most people discard their poinsettias after the holidays. However, it is possible to keep the plant and get it to bloom again next season. This process may seem rather overwhelming at first, but it is rather easy and rewarding.

In May, the remaining stems need to be cut back to about 3 to 6 inches above the soil. Now is a good time to repot the plant or separate the stems if there are several in the original pot. Use a pot with good drainage and use a quality potting soil that has been pasteurized to kill any diseases. Water thoroughly. It also is possible to root these cuttings obtained when the stems are cut back in moist perlite or sand. (See *Home Propagation Techniques*, NCR 274.)



Starting in spring, fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks with a complete fertilizer. Follow the directions on the fertilizer label for flowering plants.

When the minimum outdoor temperature is consistently above 60°F (usually the first part of June in Iowa) it is safe to move the poinsettia outside to partial shade. Increase the watering frequency when the shoots begin to grow.

The poinsettia plant needs to be pinched back to control height and to promote a fuller plant. The first pinch should be done when the first shoots are several inches long, or around the first week of July. Simply remove the upper inch of growth on each stem, leaving 4 or 5 leaves per stem. Pinching promotes more branches and ultimately a fuller plant. After pinching, a milky white sap is secreted. It is a good idea to wash the sap off the plant with a gentle shower from a hose. A second pinching may be necessary in mid-August.

Toward the end of August or beginning of September, bring the poinsettia indoors to a sunny location where the temperature is 65 to 75°F.

## Fall Care and Reblooming

Poinsettias are what horticulturists call "shortday" plants. For short-day plants to produce flowers, they must experience days with less than 12 hours of daylight. Most varieties of poinsettias require 8 to 10 weeks of short days to flower. For full color before December 25, short days need to start in early October. If you want your poinsettia to bloom earlier or later, adjust the initiation of short days. Plants are attractive for 4 to 6 weeks after the target flowering date.