



Thanksgiving has come and gone and now it is time to decorate for the holidays. No holiday decorating would be complete without poinsettias in the house. These plants are a part of most holiday traditions, but do you know what it takes to pick out the best one and makes it last long into the new year?

Poinsettias are as interesting as they are beautiful. These plants originated in Mexico and are a member of the *Euphorbiaceae* family which secretes a milky sap when wounded. The poinsettia bloom is actually a tiny yellow flower located in the center of all the color. The brightly colored red, burgundy, or pink parts that look like ‘petals’ are actually called bracts. Bracts are a type of modified leaf which change color based upon day length.

Picking out the perfect poinsettia doesn’t require too much research. Start by purchasing fresh, healthy looking plants that have been cared for properly at the point of purchase. Avoid purchasing plants that have had their plastic sleeves ‘up’ for an extended period of time while in the store. The plant produces ethylene gas as it ages, just like ripening fruit. If the plastic sleeve is left up around the bracts, the gas can actually pool in the sleeves and cause the plant to prematurely lose their bracts. This results in a thinned plant, rather than a full beautiful one.

The next tip is one many people forget. After the plant is purchased, don’t allow it to get cold. Make sure the car is warmed up before exiting the store. Also remember when transferring the plant from the store to the car, put the sleeve up and/or a plastic bag over the top. This will allow the plant to have a warm air buffer from the cold winter temperatures until it reaches the warmed car. Also try to keep it away from drafts, hot or cold, while in the car.

Once the plant is in the home, caring for poinsettias isn’t too difficult as long as you know the ‘rules’. Poinsettias need to be kept out of drafts. Keep them away from heat ducts, radiators, and doors entering the house from outside or the garage. Place the plants near a bright window, but not directly in the sunlight. Remember to move it at night if a cold draft could occur. Ideal temperatures would be between 60 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit. If the temperatures are kept above 75 degrees, the plants can decline quickly.

The most common problem faced by poinsettias is overwatering. Applying too much water can kill the roots of the plant. A good rule of thumb on when and how much to water poinsettias is to wait until the surface of the potting media begins to dry slightly before watering. Be sure to apply water before the media dries out completely and it becomes hard and unable to absorb water. Apply water until it begins to run out the bottom of the pot, wait 30 minutes, and then dump out the water that remains in the bottom of the foil sleeve or drip tray.

Lastly is the great debate, whether or not the poinsettia is poisonous. According to research, they are not considered poisonous. According to the POISINDEX, the primary resource used by most poison control centers, a 50 pound child would have to eat more than 1.25 pounds of poinsettia bracts, about 500 to 600, to exceed the experimental dose. That is not to say that you won’t have an upset stomach or vomiting if you do decide to eat some.

Resist the urge to eat and just admire the perfectly picked out poinsettia, it can provide you color well into the new year.

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