



Bucks Country Gardens

Poinsettia Care Bulletin

The POINSETTIA (*Euphorbia pulcherima*) belongs to the family EUPHORBIACEAE. This diverse family is made up of subtropical shrubs, leafless trees, and many succulents, including the very colorful "Crown of Thorns" and other interesting spiny succulents suitable for the indoor cactus garden.

The showy colored parts we call "flowers" are actually bracts. The true flowers are the yellow portion in the center of the bracts.

HISTORY

The legendary POINSETTIA is native to the area near present day Mexico. The Aztecs called the plant CUETLAXOCHITL and cultivated it for red dye made from the bracts and a medicine to counteract fever made from the latex.

During the seventeenth century the Franciscan priests settled near Mexico first used the POINSETTIA in nativity processions

Joel Robert Poinsett, our first ambassador to Mexico, first introduced POINSETTIAS into the United States in 1825. Poinsett, a botanist of great ability, distributed the POINSETTIAS to botanical gardens and to his horticultural friends, including John Bartram of Philadelphia. John Bartram gave POINSETTIAS to Robert Buist, a nurseryman, who first sold the plant as EUPHORBIA POINSETTIA. The name POINSETTIA has remained the accepted name in the English-speaking countries.

Another man instrumental in bringing us the POINSETTIA was Albert Ecke. He began raising flowers, including POINSETTIAS, in California for the cut flower market.

Later, the Eckes specialized in POINSETTIAS and developed many new varieties. White and pink POINSETTIAS are now available as well as new orange and marbled varieties.

CARE

Keep POINSETTIAS in a bright spot in the home. They should be protected from cold drafts and excessive heat.

The ideal temperature is 65-70 degrees during the day and 60 degrees at night. Do not place on the top of the TV set (the set is hot when in use.) Take POINSETTIAS out of the window at night if there is danger of chilling.

Check your POINSETTIA daily and water thoroughly (until water runs out drainage hole) whenever the soil feels dry. If your pot is wrapped in foil, pierce the foil at the bottom for drainage. Never allow the pot to stand in water. Maintain soil moisture at moderate and uniform levels, neither soggy nor bone dry.

REBLOOMING

The POINSETTIA is one of the most difficult holiday plants to re-bloom successfully.

After your POINSETTIA has bloomed, place it in a bright spot or sunny window and continue and continue to water and fertilize until the end of March.

At this time, you can either set the POINSETTIA in the sun and keep it growing on or allow it to go dormant. If you withhold water, the leaves will yellow and fall. Store the dried off plant in a cool 50 degree room in semi-darkness until the end of May. During this time water lightly, just enough to keep the roots and stems from drying out.

At the end of May bring the plant into the sun and cut back to six inches. Every time the plant grows four to five inches, cut back half. Water lightly, increasing moisture with growth. Feed once a month.

Put your plant outside for the summer and repot if necessary. Prune, allowing only a few strong branches to grow through the summer

Cut back the new shoots in early August, leaving 3-4 leaves per stem. Early in September, bring the POINSETTIA in the house and place it in a sunny window.

POINSETTIAS initiate flower buds when day length is 11 hours and 50 minutes at 60 degrees, but when the temperature is raised to 65 degrees, day length is 10 hours; and at 70 degrees, 9 hours. In late September and early October, put POINSETTIAS in a dark room or cover with a dark cloth at night for the required number of hours until the plant sets buds. Very short periods of light at night, including street light or a flashlight, can interfere with flowering.