



How to care for your poinsettias

Do:

- a. Place plants in indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day.
- b. Provide room temperatures in the range of 68 - 70 degrees F.
- c. Water plants thoroughly when the soil feels dry to the touch.
- d. Fertilize plants after the blooming season with a balanced, all-purpose fertilizer.

Don't:

- a. Place plants near cold drafts or excessive heat.
- b. Expose plants to temperatures lower than 50 degrees F.
- c. Allow plants to sit in standing water.
- d. Expose plants to chilling wind when transporting them.
- e. Fertilize plants when they are in bloom.

Now, if you have taken very good care of your poinsettias they may still be with you in late March or early April. If so, and you're ready to get rid of them, you can just remove them from their pots and toss them onto the compost pile where they'll return their nutrients to the earth. But if you're patient and diligent, you can prepare your plants for reintroduction at next year's holiday season.

In early April, cut your plants back leaving four to six nodes. Repot them in slightly larger pots or shake all the old soil off and repot them in the same pots using a commercial planting soil mix or a new soil less mixture. Place the plants in indirect sunlight, continue your watering routine, and fertilize with an all-purpose fertilizer made especially for flowering plants. After all danger of frost has passed, you can move your plants outdoors and place them in a lightly shaded location. Continue watering and feeding. By the end of May, you should see vigorous new growth. In early July, pinch about one inch or so from the ends of the stems. Repeat this process in late August, pinching the stems back until only three or four remaining leaves per stem.

As night temperatures begin to cool down in September, the plants will begin to set buds and produce flowers, so bring your plants inside and wash the leaves and stems carefully to remove stowaway insects. Continue your fertilizing and watering routine. Starting October 1, your plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. That means keep them in a totally dark closet or cover them with a box for that period of time each night! No street lights or night lights allowed if you want a colorful display for the holidays. For six to eight hours, from about 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. each day, provide your plants with plenty of sunlight, but, without fail, keep them dark at night for eight to ten weeks until the bracts turn color. Good luck! And, if your "new" plants don't look as good as you had hoped, remember that it's quite difficult to get professional looking results. That's why the Master Gardeners will have another poinsettia sale again next year.