

## Selecting a Poinsettia for the Holidays

Nothing says Happy Holidays like a poinsettia. Though we generally think of poinsettia as being red, they can also be found in white, pink, purple, yellow, and orange. The poinsettia is a native plant of Mexico that boost the USA economy around the holidays immensely.

So how to select the right poinsettia at the garden center:

First we want to make sure that the plant is in good shape when we buy it. It is important to make sure that it has dark green foliage. This indicates that the plant is healthy. Then we want to look at the bracts or the colored part of the poinsettia (most people call this the flower though the flower is the green or yellow cluster in the middle of the colored bracts). If the plant has a lot of green on the bracts or if the plant has started to lose leaves or if they are yellow then leave that plant on the shelf. Another thing to look at is how crowded are the plants? If the plants are very crowded then it could lead to premature bract loss. The plant should be 2.5 times taller than the diameter of the container and should be attractive and well balanced throughout. Lastly remember to check the true flowers, which are located at the base of the colored bracts. If the flowers are green or red tipped and fresh looking the bloom will "hold" longer than if yellow pollen is covering the flowers. Remember when you take the poinsettia home, be sure to have it sleeved or covered when outdoor temperatures are below 50°F.

Once you get it home make sure that you get the plant in a sunny window, but make sure that the leaves can't touch the cold window. The room temperature should be set between 65-75 degrees F. If we allow the temp to get any warmer than 75 degrees then we are apt to shorten the bloom life and if we get cooler than 65 degrees then we start seeing root rot. To prevent the temperature from affecting the plants we may have to draw the drapes shut in order to keep the cold drafty wind from damaging the plants.

Poinsettias are quite finicky about soil moisture. Avoid overwatering because poinsettias do not like "wet feet." But on the other hand, if the plant is allowed to wilt, it will drop some leaves. So how do you maintain proper moisture? Examine the potting soil daily by sticking your finger about a half inch into the soil. If it is dry at this depth then the plant needs watered. When it becomes dry to the touch then you should water the plant with lukewarm water until some water runs out of the drainage hole. Then discard the drainage water so that the roots are setting in the water.

Thanks for listening and have a great and Happy Holidays.