



Poinsettia Care Following Christmas

Did you receive a poinsettia this year for Christmas? Or maybe you went out and bought one that caught your eye in the store. Either way this week we are going to talk about what to do with it now. If you are one of those that enjoy buying a new poinsettia every year that is just fine but we can actually keep them and get them to re-bloom the following year. Now before we get started it is important to know that not all of us will be successful.

If you have been following my advice from early December about how to care for your poinsettia, then you are half way there. If you didn't catch that program lets catch you up just a bit. You should have your poinsettia in a warm ,65-75 degrees F (temps above 75 causes bloom life to shorten and temps below 60 can cause root rot), sunny room, but make sure that the leaves aren't touching the window pane. But you also have to pay attention to the plant and see if it needs watered. Now remember that Poinsettias are quite finicky about water. Too much and you will have issues, too little and you will start losing leaves. Now if we have done those simple guild lines then we should be ok.

Now we should continue to water as needed until spring or till April 1st. If we think back to the proper ways to water; you should: 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. Around April 1st we should start to let the plant gradually dry out.

Once we get to the beginning of May, out of danger of frost injury, we can grow out poinsettias outside. We should cut the stems back to about 4 inches above the soil and repot it in a larger container with new, fresh potting soil. Then we should choose a wind protected, sunny location with a little protection from the midday and late afternoon sun. We should also add fertilize every three to four weeks at the recommended rate of your fertilizer. Make sure to continue to check your plant throughout the summer as the soil can dry out quickly in the summer. Between May 15th and August 1st, cut off the tips of the plants occasionally to get a shorter and bushier plant that will have more branches.

As we move into the fall we should bring our plant back inside, around the first of September, and place in your sunniest window. Then starting in early October the plant must receive 14 consecutive hours of uninterrupted darkness each night in order to bloom, BUT it must also get bright light during the day to get good color. This needs done for 8-10 weeks or until the bracts show full color, usually around Thanksgiving time, at which point the dark treatment is not needed anymore. So one way to do this would be to put your plant in a closet when you get home from work, then in the morning get it out and put it in your sunniest window again. If you don't have a closet, then maybe a cardboard box. During the dark treatment extra fertilizer will be needed, so start fertilizing weekly until the dark treatment is over. If your plant doesn't look like it is going to be as pretty as you would like, that's ok as at this time there should be other poinsettias on the market at your local stores.

Summary:

1. During winter, place plants in brightest area of the home.
2. In summer, some protection is needed from direct midday and afternoon sun.
3. Day temperature should be 65° to 75°F
4. Night temperature should be no lower than 60°F.
5. Remember to protect from drafts of hot or cold air.
6. Move plants away from windows during winter nights.
7. Keep soil moist but not soggy wet.
8. Water when soil becomes dry to the touch.
9. Do not let the plant wilt.
10. Use lukewarm water.
11. Discard drainage water.
12. Fertilize monthly with houseplant fertilizer.
13. Prune plants in spring and summer.
14. Bring plants inside by September 1.
15. Begin dark treatment October 1 for 8-10 weeks.
16. Around Thanksgiving, dark treatment shouldn't be needed anymore.

With that I will say good luck and hope to hear that some of you had success in getting your poinsettias to re-bloom next winter.

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