

Keep poinsettias looking great through the holidays

Along with the fragrant evergreens and twinkling lights synonymous with the holiday season, poinsettias make up a key component of holiday decorating.

Unlike holly and some of the other greenery that is commonly associated with the holidays, poinsettias do not naturally thrive in colder temperatures. These plants originate in southern Mexico and were considered an exotic plant when first introduced to the United States by Joel Robert Poinsett, the first American ambassador to Mexico.

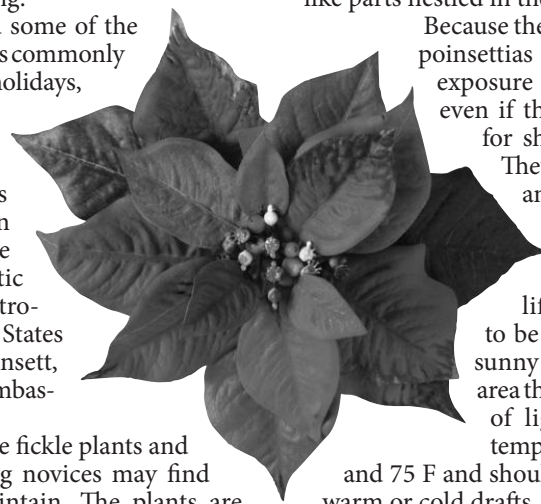
Poinsettias can be fickle plants and ones that gardening novices may find challenging to maintain. The plants are

comprised of green foliage, colorful (often red) flower bracts, and the actual flowers of the plants, which are the red or green button-like parts nestled in the center of the bracts.

Because they are a tropical plant, poinsettias can be damaged by exposure to low temperatures, even if they are only exposed for short periods of time.

They should be wrapped and protected against the elements when brought home. For maximum plant life, poinsettias need to be placed near a warm, sunny window, or another area that has ample amounts of light. They thrive in temperatures between 60

and 75 F and should be kept away from warm or cold drafts.



Water the plant whenever the surface feels dry to the touch. Water until it drains out the bottom, but don't let the plant sit in water. Over- or under-watering can cause leaves to drop prematurely and wilt. If your home lacks in humidity, you may need to water the plant more frequently. Poinsettias do not need to be fertilized while the plant is in bloom.

The Ohio State University Extension says poinsettias can be reflowered the following Christmas, but unless a yearlong schedule of care is observed, the results usually are not good. You can speak with a gardening expert or consult online resources for the proper care schedule. Caring for a poinsettia year-round involves gradually drying out the plant and storing it in a cool location. The plant later will be moved outdoors and then back inside and pruned to keep a full shape.

Poinsettias are short-day plants, which means they flower about 10 weeks after

the daylight shortens to about 12 hours or less. Therefore, to have the plant in full flower by Christmas, it will have to be kept in complete darkness between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. from the first part of October until Thanksgiving. Many people find the affordability of poinsettias makes it more convenient to buy new ones each year than try to foster regrowth.

Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous to humans or animals, but they should not be ingested due to the potential for allergic reactions. Poinsettias can help remove pollutants from indoor air, which is advantageous during the winter months when doors and windows are typically kept closed.

Select plants that have dark green foliage and no low or damaged leaves. This ensures the best success for keeping poinsettias looking healthy and vibrant throughout the holiday season.

Make a child's first holiday special



Thoughtful gifts can make this first holiday season one of joy for new children in the family.

A baby's life is filled with milestones. First smiles, first steps and first words are just a few of the moments parents will treasure.

A baby's first holiday season is another special time to cherish. Shoppers seeking gifts to make a baby's first holiday special have many clever, cute and functional items to choose from. Several of these gifts can become keepsakes to be tucked into memory boxes for growing kids to look at later in life.

• **Christmas pajamas:** What better way to await for the arrival of Christmas than in a pair of snuggly pajamas? Send pajamas ahead of Christmas Day so that new parents will have plenty of adorable photo opportunities as their baby boy or girl tears open the gifts. Stores stock several different fun and festive prints, or look into pajamas that can be personalized.

• **Photo print package:** Photography packages can involve the entire expanding family and will catalog special moments in time. Purchase studio or on-location time with a private photographer, or use one of the popular photography chains found in malls and department stores.

• **Personalized framed print:** Commemorate the first holiday season with your child by getting a print made with his or her name and age. Leave a space on the print so that the child's parents can customize it even further with their son or daughter's footprints. Include a matted frame and child-safe ink or paint to complete the gift.

• **Keepsake ornament:** Some families embrace the tradition of adding a new ornament to their Christmas trees each year. Purchase an ornament for the new baby with the year so he or she can join in the tradition.

• **Crochet or knit blanket:** Crafty individuals can

make a blanket that the newest addition to the family can enjoy during the chilly days of winter. These blankets often become treasured keepsakes that may be passed down throughout the family or kept tucked away for kids so they can give them to their own children once they start their own families.

• **Rocking horse:** Babies don't wait long before they start to run around and climb. A classic rocking horse makes for a fun baby gift, and rocking horses come in many different styles. If you are the family carpenter, you can even purchase some unfinished wood from a craft store and then make this into a homemade gift your favorite little guy or gal will always cherish.

• **Piggy bank:** Foster good saving habits by gifting a personalized piggy bank. Get kids off on the right foot by depositing a few dollars into the bank before giving the gift.

A new baby brings many changes and fun experiences. Gift-givers can make a baby's first holiday season one filled with joy and whimsy with creative gift ideas.

