



A weekly question/answer column

**My Poinsettia Is Still Lovely, How Can I
Keep It That Way?**

Jerry Goodspeed answers:*

Even though the holidays are gone, your poinsettias don't have to be. With a little care, they can still brighten up your home for months to come.

Poinsettias are native Mexican plants. They love the holiday season because they are shortday plants that require long nights to launch their color change. The colorful bracts of these plants are leaves, not flowers, with the most common bract color being red. The flower buds are the red or green buttons in the center of the bracts that open to a small yellow flower. Healthy poinsettias have dark green leaves below the bracts and foliage all the way to the base.

Consider these tips to keep your poinsettia healthy and bright.

- Poinsettias need a minimum of six hours of indirect sunlight each day.
- Protect the plants from freezing temperatures, especially when transporting them. Place them in a lightfilled room away from drafts. They do best in rooms between 55 and 65 degrees at night and 65 to 70 degrees during the day. Keep poinsettias away from drafty locations and avoid exposing them to temperatures below 50 degrees F.
- Water poinsettias when the soil is dry 2 to 3 inches down. The plants are very sensitive to overwatering and will develop root rot quickly if kept too wet. Water the pot thoroughly, letting excess water drain out of the bottom.
- Apply an allpurpose, watersoluble fertilizer once a week to keep plants healthy during the holidays. Once the colorful bracts drop off, reduce watering and fertilization to give the plants a rest period. Trim the poinsettia back so that just a few leaves are left.
- With proper care, poinsettia bracts can be maintained until about March or April. Once they begin to fall cut the plant back, leaving about six buds. For the first couple of weeks it will look like a stick. Water and fertilize as before, and by May it will start to leaf out again.
- To keep it small and compact, cut it back about mid-July and early September to stimulate branching.
- Beginning the first of October, put the plant in complete darkness as soon as the sun sets, allowing a minimum of 14 hours of darkness. A bag can be placed over the plant, or it can be set in a closet throughout the day. By the end of November, it will start to color and you will be able to enjoy it for another season.
- Poinsettias can be taken outdoors in the spring when the danger of a freeze is past. Place the plants in a shady location, and they can be enjoyed throughout the summer.

* Jerry Goodspeed is Utah State University Extension Horticulturist