

Euphorbia pulcherrima (means beautiful Euphorbia)

Holiday Care

The Poinsettia's flower bracts will last longer if the plant is placed near a bright window with filtered sun. The daytime temperatures should be from 60° to 70° with a slight drop in temperature at night. This plant does best in a cool (not cold) room. Avoid areas where there is a draft or sudden fluctuations in temperature. Do not allow the leaves to touch cold windowpanes. Use a humidity tray if the plant is going to be in a very dry room. If all goes well, bracts should remain attractive for two or more months. Water when the potting medium is moderately dry (approximately half to 2/3 of the way down the pot). Water thoroughly until the water just comes out of the drainage holes. Use tepid water. Do not let the plant sit in water. No feeding is necessary.

After the Holidays

Most people discard their poinsettias after the bracts have faded or fallen. But if you want to try keeping one for next year and getting it to rebloom (and if you like a challenge), try the following:

1. Cut the stems down to about three or four inches from their base (make sure you cut above a node).
2. Allow the potting mix to become almost dry – never completely dry. Keep the plant at normal room temperature in bright filtered light until April, and then begin to water on a regular basis.
3. Your plant will again begin to grow. Then you can do one of two things:
 - a. Take 3" tip cuttings from new side shoots and root to make new plants. A good media mix is equal parts peat moss and coarse sand or perlite. Treat cuttings with warm water to seal in the latex. Use rooting hormone. Insert the cuttings in a pot and keep them at room temperature in filtered sunlight. Water only enough to make the mixture barely moist. Allow top 2/3's to dry out between watering. When rooting has taken place (about 3 or 4 weeks) and cuttings are growing actively, move the starts into pots with regular potting mix.
 - b. Keep the old plant growing as it is. Check to see if it needs to be in a bigger pot. Roots growing through the drainage holes, water running through the soil unusually fast, and soil which dries rapidly between watering signifies that the plant needs to be repotted. When repotting a poinsettia, use a pot that is only 1 or 2 inches larger than the one it is in and use a standard indoor potting mix.
4. Fertilize lightly about every three to four weeks until September. Use an all-purpose fertilizer.
5. During the summer cut off the tips of each shoot to encourage better branching.
6. Starting in early September, the plant must be in total darkness for a minimum of 12 to 14 hours a day for 8 weeks. The poinsettia will not color up if you do not provide a dark period each night and bright light during the day. Using a light-tight box or black poly bag around the plant is effective. Do not prune the plant after you've begun this process.

NOTE: Because growers usually use growth retardants on the poinsettias to keep them compact, your plant will be taller the second year and probably not look as nice as when it was first purchased.