

HOW DO I KEEP POINSETTIAS ALIVE AND THRIVING FOR NEXT CHRISTMAS?

Poinsettias are one of the favourite Xmas plants, yet they are the most commonly abandoned indoor plant. A plant should be for life, not just for Xmas So here are a few tips to keep poinsettias alive and thriving for next Christmas.



The bright petals of Poinsettias, which look like flowers, are actually a cluster of upper red leaves of the plant, called **bracts**. Poinsettia flowers are small, green or yellow, and grow inconspicuously in the centre of each bunch of red **leaves**. With a little special treatment these will return next year.

Keep your Poinsettia plant near a sunny window where it will have the most available sunlight for at least five hours a day. A window that faces south, east or west is the best location to place your Poinsettia. Be careful to avoid cold drafts and that no part of the plant touches the cold windowpane which will injure your plant.

Avoid overwatering. When the surface of the soil is dry on touching it, water it slowly until it runs freely out the drainage hole in the container. The pot should be able drain the excess water as waterlogging in the pot is a common cause of Poinsettia loss. In bright light and a low humidity dry room, they will require more frequent watering.

Temperature. Maintain the temperature of the location at 18 to 25°C during the daylight hours for Poinsettias to maintain its good blooms. Move you plant to a cooler place at night if you can, but no lower than 16°C, otherwise the leaves will drop

Spring Treatment Allow your poinsettias to go a little drier between watering in the spring, and cut about 4 to 5 inches from each stem to produce a fuller bushy specimen for Xmas. Also, start **feeding** your plant with a standard indoor plant food once a week though the summer months and every two weeks in Autumn.

During the Summer Months. From June you can take your plant outside. Find a sunny spot in the morning and avoid exposure to the afternoon direct sun. They

will thrive with a period of being outside and it will help keep typical insect pests down.

Autumn Dark Treatment. Poinsettias will produce flower buds when the days are less than 12 hours. To achieve flowering and red leaves for Christmas, from October 1st protect the plants from light by placing them in a dark room or between 5 in the evening until 8 the next morning daily. After 40 days the plants can then be kept in normally lit rooms again. With continuing water, fertilizer, and kept between 18 to 25 °C temperatures, the plants will flower during December.

NOTE: Exposure to even the slightest amount of artificial light during this period will inhibit flowering. To avoid entering the room and accidentally exposing your plant to light, cover it with a cardboard box.

Winter ready for Xmas blooms. As soon as your poinsettias have bloomed, you can stop feeding them and water as in the previous Xmas. If the heating is on high be careful that they don't dry out. Now is the time again to enjoy the delightful red bracts of this spectacular plant.

