

# Grow poinsettias all year

**Q**uestion: I love poinsettias and always buy them at Christmas time but then they die and I throw them away. How do I care for them so I can use them again and again?

**Answer:** I love poinsettias also and feel it is such a waste for beautiful, healthy plants to be discarded after Christmas. (Also, the same for the poor trees)!

First, poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are a little on the fussy side. You will need to follow directions closely, especially the fertilization requirements and the light/dark requirements.

In zones 8-9, you may plant poinsettias outside. Unfortunately, in our area they are houseplants for most of the year and only outside in the summer. The poinsettia is native to Central America so, to grow successfully, we attempt to recreate the tropical climate that it hails from.

After Christmas, until the end of March, keep the



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poinsettias by a window with bright, but indirect sun. Let them dry very slightly, then water. Do not let them get so dry that the leaves wilt too much. They should be in a pot that drains well. If the window you select for them is very warm, you may have to water daily. During this time use a liquid houseplant fertilizer, following the directions on the label.

Eventually, the lovely red bracts will start to fade and fall off. When this happens, cut the stems back to just below the flowers. Continue to care for them and they will continue to grow.

In springtime, when the nighttime temperature is consistently above 50 degrees, put your plants outside in bright but indirect light. They

will continue to grow but will be completely green. Prune in midsummer by a half or a third (using your own judgement). At this time, repot them using new potting soil. You may use the same pot unless the growth has been significant enough to warrant a bigger pot. Continue to feed with houseplant fertilizer.

When the temperature changes at the end of the summer, bring the pots back in the house. This should be done before temperatures at night fall below 50 degrees.

Now, for the most important part. In order to turn red, the plants need 14 to 15 hours of total, uninterrupted darkness within a 24 hour period. Not just dark, but total darkness. Be mindful of this when covering them that there is no space, crack or hole where light could peek through. This covering should start around Sept. 20 and continue to the end of October. At this time the temperature at night should be about 65

degrees.

Also, it is helpful to cover them at the same time every night and uncover at the same time every morning. This way you will never have to count or guess how long the plants were covered. It will ensure consistent darkness for the appropriate length of time.

This brings us to the beginning of November. If you were successful with the black-out routine you will begin to notice the plants start to color. At this time, you can end the darkness routine and put the plants in bright, indirect light. By the end of November, coloring will be more pronounced and will continue.

Continue to water and fertilize while enjoying your poinsettias for another year! Then, repeat the above directions.

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