

## Give a Poinsettia as a Gift



BARTOW -- With the Christmas season drawing near, it's time to think of decorations and gift-giving.

As the poinsettia is one of the most popular potted plants, you may want to purchase one as a gift. They now come in a wide variety of colors, sizes and shapes. The Monet Twilight has pink and red speckled bracts, while the Sonar White Glitter has a Jingle Bells look with red petals flecked with white specks. The cultivars Plum Pudding and Cortez Burgundy have purple bracts.

The colorful part of the poinsettia is the modified leaves known as bracts. The actual flowers are yellow, found in tight clusters and are relatively inconspicuous. There are single and double bracts in red, pink, white and variegated.

When selecting your poinsettia, look for a compact plant with large colorful bracts and dark green leaves. The leaves should be present from the bracts to the base of the plant, nearly to the soil line. The bracts should extend over the lower foliage. Plants with true flowers that have fallen out should be avoided, as this is an indication of maturity. If the flowers are producing pollen, the bracts will be fading soon and the useful display life has passed.

If you receive a poinsettia as a gift, the following steps will be helpful in maintaining an attractive and healthy plant. If kept indoors, the plant should be placed in a sunny location protected from sudden temperature changes caused by heating vents or drafts. Poinsettias need day temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit, and night temperatures of no less than 60 F. Temperatures of 50 F and below may cause the leaves to wilt and the bracts to drop.

When the soil feels dry to the touch, the plant should be watered thoroughly. Watering correctly is very important as the plant will not tolerate over-watering, and under-watering causes wilting and leaf drop. If a decorative foil is wrapped around the pot, punch a hole in it to allow the water to drain away.

After four to six weeks, the poinsettia will become dormant and leaves will fall leaving only a stem. The watering should be reduced gradually at this time, but not so severely as to cause the stem to shrivel. Place the plant in a cool location with some light.

In south and central Florida, the plant can be used as a shrub in landscapes after the danger of frost has past. Dig a hole that is 1 foot wider and 6 inches deeper than the root ball and back fill the hole with enough soil so that the plant will be sitting in the hole

at the same height as it was in the container. Water thoroughly to remove any air pockets. By placing mulch around the plant you will conserve moisture and help control weeds. The plant should be fertilized every four to six weeks.

To keep the plant bushy and compact with lots of flowers, pinch the tips of new shoots one-half inch when they reach 4 to 5 inches -- each pinched shoot will produce two or more new shoots. Repeat this procedure until the middle of August. Pinching back the tips of shoots after the end of August will prevent or delay flowering at Christmas time.

Poinsettias will not bloom indoors if lights are used during the night when the flower buds are forming. The plants should receive only eight hours of light per day from Oct. 1 to Nov. 15. This can be accomplished by placing the plant in a dark room or covering it with a cardboard box. Discontinue treatment when bracts begin to show color.

By Thanksgiving the bracts should show color -- and by Christmas they should be in full bloom.

Contributed by David Shibles, University of Florida IFAS Extension

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### Images



‘Shimmer Surprise’



‘Christmas Time’



‘Christmas Time’



'Freedom Red



Winter Rose



Winter Rose...



Winter Rose...



Winter Rose