



Poinsettia Plants

Poinsettia plants remain one of the most popular holiday flowers. The familiar red flowers have been joined by even flashier colors. (Actually, what we think of as poinsettia flowers are not really flowers at all. They are modified leaves called bracts. The bright bracts are designed to attract insects to the tiny yellow flowers in their centers.) Because poinsettias have been forced into bloom, they need some extra care, to keep them in bloom throughout the holidays.

Besides their general care, one of the most common questions about poinsettias after Christmas is "How can I care for my poinsettia so that it will bloom again next Christmas?". While this can be done, it's a very fussy, exacting process and since the plants are not that expensive, you might just choose to start fresh next year.

When You First Bring Your Poinsettia Home

Light - Place it near a sunny window. South, east or west facing windows are preferable to a north facing window. Poinsettias are tropicals and will appreciate as much direct sunlight as you can provide.

Heat - To keep the poinsettia in bloom as long as possible, maintain a temperature of 65 - 75 degrees F during the day. Dropping the temperature to about 60 degrees F. at night will not hurt the plant. However, cold drafts or allowing the leaves to touch a cold window can injure the leaves and cause premature leaf drop. If you've ever seen a leggy poinsettia in bloom, with only a couple of sad looking leaves hanging on, it was probably exposed to temperatures that were too cool or to extreme shifts in temperature.

Water - Water the plant whenever the surface feels dry to the touch. Water until it drains out the bottom, but do not let the plant sit in water. Wilting is another common cause of leaf drop. A wilted plant can be revived and salvaged, but it will take another season to improve its appearance.

Humidity - Lack of humidity during dry seasons, in particular winter, is an ongoing houseplant problem. If your home tends to be dry and your poinsettia is in direct light, you will find yourself watering frequently, possibly every day.

The Bottom Line on Poinsettia's Being Poisonous

They certainly are not meant to be eaten by humans, pets, or livestock and ingesting poinsettias would probably cause some stomach upset, as would eating most any houseplant. However poinsettias have undergone extensive testing and there is no evidence that they are toxic or unsafe to have in the house.

How to Care for Christmas Cactus

The Christmas cactus will adapt to low light conditions, but the plant will produce blooms more readily if exposed to brighter light. That being said, too much direct sunlight can burn its leaves, so keep the Christmas cactus in an appropriate area to avoid this.

Christmas cactus plant requires frequent and thorough watering, during its active growth in spring and summer, keeping the soil slightly moist. Allow Christmas cactus moisture levels to drop and dry out some between watering intervals, but never completely, and never let the plant sit in water, as this will lead to root and stem rot. Applying a mild houseplant fertilizer solution every other week is also acceptable.

When considering how to care for Christmas cactus, keep in mind it prefers temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F with average to high humidity levels. Placing a tray of pebbles filled with water beneath the Christmas cactus container is a good way to add more humidity to the home.

About six to eight weeks before you want the plant to rebloom, you should allow the plant to begin its dormancy cycle by cutting back on moisture and reducing both light and temperature. Make sure the plant receives 12-14 hours of darkness and average temperatures around 50-55 F. Also, keep the Christmas cactus away from drafty areas.

When given proper care and placed in a suitable location, the Christmas cactus may even surprise you with additional blooming cycles throughout the year.