

Extension Notes

Personal Column for December 14, 2010

By Gary Hall, ISU Regional Extension Education Director

Pride in Your Poinsettia

Poinsettias are a colorful Christmas plant that is frequently given as a gift or purchased to give a home that special holiday touch. With some help from Richard Jauron, ISU Extension Horticulture Specialist, I would like to share some experiences and points of proper care so you can take pride in your poinsettia.

When you have decided to purchase one of these beautiful plants, you can choose from a myriad of colors. Red is my favorite but you can now find purple, burgundy, pink, salmon, white, cream and even gold according to Mr. Jauron. He points out that the colorful part of the poinsettia is actually modified leaves or bracts. The flowers of the plant are yellow to green, button-like objects located in the center of the bracts.

While selecting a poinsettia to decorate our county Extension offices, I followed Richard's guidance by choosing well-shaped plants with dark green foliage and well-colored bracts. I avoided poinsettias with wilted foliage, broken stems or few leaves.

Proper care for the poinsettia is important. Allow me to illustrate. A church I attended some years ago had a large number of poinsettias decorating the sanctuary one Christmas. When entering the church I began to notice that the plants looked sickly and wilted. The Pastor explained to the congregation that after he had placed the plants on the stage a few days ago he left and forgot to keep the heat turned up. The cold temperatures had provided him with some excellent sermon examples about sickness and death.

Avoid the cold injury at purchase by having it carefully wrapped before taking it outdoors to transport home. Exposing the poinsettia to freezing temperatures, even for a few minutes, may cause its bracts and leaves to blacken and drop which would require you to provide an explanation to your congregation, family or friends. As soon as you get home, unwrap the poinsettia and place it near a sunny window or other well-lighted location. Don't let the plant touch the cold window pane. Keep the poinsettia away from cold drafts or heat sources. Poinsettias prefer temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Check the pot's soil moisture daily with your finger. In an office situation this may be a challenge since there are a couple of days when no one is in the office. Fortunately the poinsettia is fairly forgiving. When the soil surface becomes dry to the touch, water the plant until water begins to flow out the bottom of the pot. Many times the plant will recover.

You will enjoy your poinsettia by following Mr. Jauron's directions. When given good care, a poinsettia should remain attractive for several weeks, well after the Christmas and New Year's Day holidays. I hope your poinsettia will be a part of providing you with a Christmas season of beauty, meaning and joy. Merry Christmas.

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