

## Selecting and Caring for a Popular Holiday Flower – The Poinsettia

The Poinsettia is one of the most popular potted flowers purchased and gifted during this holiday season. Did you know it has a special day all its own? By an act of Congress, December 12 was set aside as National Poinsettia Day. The day marks the death of Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, who is credited with introducing the native Mexican plant to the United States. The purpose of the day is to enjoy the beauty of this holiday plant. Here are some tips to help you in selecting and caring for the plant to extend the enjoyment of your poinsettia for the holiday season and perhaps for more weeks beyond.

Selecting and transporting the perfect poinsettia:

- Choose a plant with dark green foliage down to the soil line
- The bracts, (showy, colorful leaves which most people think are the flowers), should be fully colored, not damaged and free of brown and green leaves
- Check the true flowers in the center of the tracts. If the flowers area green or red-tipped and fresh looking the bloom will “hold” longer than if yellow pollen is covering the flowers
- When transporting, be sure to have it sleeved or covered when outdoor temperatures are below 50°F. Poinsettias can be damaged by even brief exposures to low temperatures.

How can you make the poinsettia last during the holiday season?

- Place the poinsettia in indirect light - six hours of light daily is ideal
- Do not let any part of plan touch cold window panes
- Indoor temperatures from 60 to 70°F is best – high temperatures will shorten the plant’s life
- Place in cool room 55 to 60°F at night will extend blooming time
- Avoid temperature fluctuations and warm or cold drafts
- Water only when the soil is dry
- Remove foil covering drain holes before watering
- Do not let sit with water in the saucer
- Do not fertilize when the plant is in bloom

If you would like to keep the plant and get it to bloom again next season, the following Iowa State University Extension publication will guide you through the process: Reiman Gardens, Poinsettia Care, Publication Number RG 316. The publication is available at your county extension office or can be found on-line at the following web address: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/RG316.pdf>