

Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) from Mexico



Using my simple methods, this poinsettia blooms year after year. Photo by Randall Prue Poinsettia is named after Dr. Joel R. Poinsett who introduced this plant to America. It grows outdoors to 1.5 metre, but the ones which are sold here are largely hybrids, which have been bred to be short and compact, with a lot of colored leaves (red, pink, salmon, white, and variegated combinations).

Destroying the Myths

Two notions about Poinsettias persist, and both are incorrect:

- That Poinsettia is toxic to pets and to humans.
- That Poinsettia has to be put into a closet to induce blooming.

Read on for enlightenment!

This article is based on the topic (Poinsettia) in Keeping Them Alive, but contains additional "bonus" material not available in 1982. The photo at left is a pink poinsettia tree (has a main trunk like a tree, as opposed to the small bushes that are more common) that I was given in 2006. This photo was taken in January 2009 and marks its third straight year of blooming without any tedious "closet business" or light management tricks. It blooms because I feed it

well and give it the basic environment that it likes (think "Mexico") without over-doing it.

The plant produces the colored leaves at the same time as it produces flowers, which are above the colored leaves. If you care to refer to the colored leaves as flowers, go ahead. They are an integral part of the flowering process.

Everybody's big concern, of course, is to keep the plant in bloom for as long as possible, and to have it flower annually. The process is not complicated, but it is precise and involved.

After Christmas, a Poinsettia may keep its coloured leaves until June, if well cared for. At this time, your objective is to enjoy the plant. Feed it enough to keep it healthy. Keep it in a bright spot. It likes fresh warm air with a slight drop at night (not below 10° C. or 50° F.).

It does not want to dry completely, and will immediately droop and lose leaves if it does. Once it has drooped, it does not always recover (even if watered promptly). Overly wet soil may cause lower leaves to drop.

In spring, as soon as nights are above 10° C., your Poinsettia can be repotted, using PHILODENDRON SOIL (see "Potting Soils" on page 25 of [Keeping Them Alive](#)), in preparation for its period of active growth, and moved outdoors. It enjoys full sun (to read about how to manage the move outdoors, read "Light" on page 11 of [Keeping Them Alive](#)).

It will grow thick and quick throughout summer. Pruning should be done from spring to mid-summer if you want a short full plant. The tree shown here is cut back severely each spring. By fall, it is always lush and ready to bloom.

Here Comes the Closet

In fall, when night temperatures drop below 10° C. or 50° F., bring your Poinsettia indoors. It now wants a night that is at least 12 hours long, and many people put the plant in a closet or

other dark place, **at night** to accomplish this. **Do not leave it in a closet for 2 months**, as many have confessed doing. It still wants light in the daytime, but for less than 12 hours. It has been said that any light on the plant at night will stop it from flowering. I know people (including myself) whose Poinsettias have bloomed with no special effort to give it long nights. Once buds have formed, the flowering process has begun and will continue to completion without long nights. I have never put a Poinsettia into a closet, and I have enjoyed lush colorful growth and blossom year after year.

Common Insect Pests and Problems

Watch for aphids and mites. Over many decades, I have enjoyed the company of many Poinsettias, and not once have I had to deal with a harmful insect. If you ever do have to deal with an insect on a Poinsettia it is most likely going to be on a "new" one (newly purchased, just left the greenhouse). I find these plants to be extremely sensitive. Forgetting to water a new Poinsettia could be fatal, whereas my older acclimated and established plants can tolerate a big of neglect. For more on this topic, see the introduction to "Here's Where You Get Involved" on page 15 of [Keeping Them Alive](#) .

Is a Poinsettia Toxic?

I searched the Internet for the answer to that question, because in my entire life, I have never heard of an actual instance of any person or pet suffering any ill effect from ingesting Poinsettia parts. I found a very interesting article at rabbit.org, [the website of the House Rabbit Society](#) . The short answer is "non toxic" and in the longer version impressive research and statistics are cited (studies by Ohio State University on the toxicity of Poinsettia; statistics from POISINDEX, the information resource for poison control centers). Nonetheless, according to rabbit.org, a Bruskin/Goldring Research poll reveals that 50% of Americans continue to believe that a Poinsettia is toxic.

How many folks are denying themselves the joy of owning this colorful and long-lasting plant?