

Caring for Your Poinsettia Year Around

First, be sure you choose a plant with small, tightly clustered yellow buds in the center. Look for crisp, brightly colored, undamaged bracts (leaves). Avoid plants that are displayed in drafty areas.

Place the plant in a room with plenty of bright, natural light staying at least 6" from the window. Keep out of drafts (door that open to the outside and heating ducts) and away from appliances and refrigerators, and never place it on the television set.

Water only when dry; discard excess water that runs through the pot's drainage holes. If wrapped in foil, make sure the pot doesn't sit in water inside the decorative wrap.

NEW YEAR'S DAY--Fertilize with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer at recommended rates. Continue to provide adequate light and water for prolonged bloom for several weeks.

VALENTINE'S DAY--Check your plant for signs of insects such as white fly. If your plant has become long and leggy, cut back to about five inches tall.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY--Remove faded and dried parts of the plant. Add more soil, preferably a commercially available sterile soil mix. Keep the plant in a very bright interior location.

MEMORIAL DAY--Trim off two to three inches of branches to promote side branching. Repot to a larger container using a sterile growing mix.

FATHER'S DAY--Move the plant outside for the summer; place in indirect light.

FOURTH OF JULY--Trim the plant again. Move it into full sun. Continue to water and fertilize but increase the amount to accelerate growth.

LABOR DAY--Move indoors to a spot that gets at least six hours of direct light daily, preferably more. As new growth begins, reduce the amount of fertilizer.

AUTUMNAL EQUINOX--Starting on or near Sept. 21, give the plant 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness (put the plant in a closet, basement, or under a box) and 11 hours of bright light each day. Maintain night temperatures in the low 60 degree F range. Continue to water and fertilize. Rotate the plant daily to give all sides even light.

THANKSGIVING--Discontinue the short day/long night treatment. Put the plant in a sunny area that gets at least six hours of direct light. Reduce water and fertilizer.

CHRISTMAS--Enjoy your "new" poinsettia. Start the cycle all over again.

Merry Christmas!!