

## Poinsettia - *Euphorbia Pulcherrima*

During the holidays, many of you will be giving and receiving this quintessential holiday plant. I've gathered some handy information to make everyone an expert in 'poinsettiaology', so let me take this opportunity to pass along some poinsettia history, issues, and care.

### The History and Legend of the Poinsettia

The poinsettia name comes from Joel R. Poinsett, who was the first American Ambassador to Mexico in 1825. He introduced the plant to the United States on one of his trips home. The enchanting legend of the poinsettia dates back several centuries, to a Christmas Eve in Mexico when a little girl named Pepita had no gift to present to the Christ Child. Her cousin Pedro urged her to give a humble gift. So, on her way to church she gathered up some weeds she found along the road. As she approached the altar, a miracle happened. The weeds blossomed into brilliant flowers! Then they were called Flores de Noche Buena – Flowers of the Holy Night. Now they are called poinsettias.



### The Myth of the Poinsettia Plant\*

As the holiday season approaches the yearly tradition of decorating homes and offices is in full swing. One of the most common items that Americans use in their seasonal decorating is the poinsettia plant, but some may steer away from this tradition, as they fear that the plant is toxic. The following dispels those rumors:

- Scientific research from the Ohio State University has proven the poinsettia to be non-toxic to both humans and pets. All parts of the plants were tested, including the leaves and sap.
- According to the AMA Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants, the poinsettia has been found to produce either no effect, orally or topically, or occasional cases of vomiting.

### How to Care for the Poinsettia\*\*

The life of the poinsettia, if cared for properly during the holidays, can be extended throughout the year. During the Holidays

- When selecting a poinsettia, choose tightly clustered, small, central flowers with crisp and bright foliage.
- When surface soil is dry to the touch, water thoroughly. Discard excess water in the saucer.
- To prolong color, keep a temperature range of 60 degrees for night and 72 degrees for day. High humidity is preferable.
- Avoid cold or hot drafts and protect from cold winds.

### To Re-bloom for the Next Season

- During winter, continue to follow holiday upkeep tips.
- When bracts fade, cut back to eight inches.
- Lightly fertilize every three to four weeks.
- When temperatures are warm, place plant outdoors; first in indirect, then direct light. Avoid temperatures below 50 degrees throughout summer.
- Cut back stems and branches twice during the summer. Repot if needed.
- On Labor Day, move plant inside. Provide six or more hours of direct light.
- From October 1 through mid-December, confine plant to darkness for 14 hours, giving it 10 hours of natural light. This will force the green bracts to color.

\* News release adapted from Texas State Florists Association, Nov. 2002.

\*\* Information from Ellisonsgreenhouses.com