Perfect Holiday Poinsettias

by BJ Jarvis, Pasco County Extension Horticulture Agent

Did you know that poinsettias have a day set aside to celebrate them? Every year on December 12 we recognize Dr. Joel Poinset’s plant “discovery” while traveling in Mexico in the 1800’s. Today, it is the plant symbol of the Christmas holidays. Since then, the poinsettia has been widely hybridized to produce larger colorful bracts and in many different and beautiful forms.

So that these bright and cheerful poinsettias don’t becoming “throwaway plants,” sitting at the curb in the New Year, here are some selection and care tips.

How to Select a Plant:

- Choose plants that have compact, sturdy stems. Clear plastic sleeve can mask weak or broken stems.
- Select a plant with plenty of colored bracts – the colorful part that many think are the flowers are actually modified leaves. Once at home, this is about all you’ll get, so start with a good looking plant at the garden center.
- Dark green leaves all the way to the bottom of the stems assure plants have been well cared for and are healthy from the start.
- Carefully transport your new plants as it is very easy to break stems if care is not used.

At Home Care:

- **Choose a Spot.** Once you get your healthy plant home, poinsettias prefer cooler temperatures (upper 60’s to mid-70’s). If you keep the house on the warm side, these beauties may perform poorly, dropping leaves and yellowing.
- **Sunlight.** Once the colorful bracts have set, the amount of light that a plant gets should have little influence over their color. Poinsettias prefer bright light to keep them looking good. No dark corners, please.
- **Water.** Water the plant only when the top of the soil feels dry. If plants are in a water-tight container, watch that the plant doesn’t sit in water to prevent root rot.
- **Care after the Holidays.** If you choose to put it outdoors, you may either plant it in the ground or keep it in the container. During the winter months, freezing temperatures here in central Florida can cause poinsettia damage. Containerized plants can be moved under cover. Either let nature prune for you or resolve to cover during the occasional freezes.

For additional information on poinsettias or other holiday plants, call or email Pasco Extension. Our phone number is 352-521-4288, and you can email us at Pasco@ufl.edu.

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