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Keep your poinsettia all year long

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It's more than likely safe to assume that although almost anyone would name the poinsettia as the Christmas flower of choice, few of those people realize that the poinsettia with the proper care can last for many Christmases to come. According to Dave Stubbe from the Flower Market, the first step to keeping a poinsettia for more than just this Christmas season is to start with a healthy plant.

In finding a healthy plant there are three things to look for. The plant should have a thick stem, a large bloom size and the roots should be whitish in color. Stubbe said, "Pure white (roots) are the best but that's usually only found in the young ones."

Once you've selected your plant, it should be kept in temperatures right around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The plant will also need to be watered regularly, but an exact amount is difficult to specify because of variables present, such as the size of the plant, humidity where it is being kept, placement, etc. Stubbe pointed out that one place you do not want to put your poinsettia is next to a heat vent.

Although poinsettias are commonly associated with Christmas, snow, winter, etc., they are actually from the tropics and consequently need to get plenty of light. Stubbe emphasized, "Lighting is very important." Because the sun is not as intense in the winter time, poinsettias are able to withstand direct light, but in the summer they're usually grown under cover away from the scorching hot rays of the summer sun.

In most situations the bloom will fall off the plant in six to ten weeks, depending on the variety, but Stubbe pointed out that he's heard of some that have received such good care they have bloomed all the way up to April.

After the blooms fall off, the plant leafs out again and may send up new shoots. When spring rolls around, a person may plant their poinsettia outside. Stubbe recommends the north side of the house because the plant needs to be in a shady, bright spot.

An important thing to remember when growing a long-lasting poinsettia is that like most plants it needs to be fertilized. In the fall, once it feels like it's going to freeze it is time to bring the plant back in the house, and if so inclined, you may shift the plant up in pot size, but Stubbe warns, "No black dirt. Never, ever, ever!"



Dave Stubbe has poinsettias of several colors and sizes. Some of his biggest are up to four feet tall.

Stubbe said that at the Flower Market, soilist dirt is used which is made up of composted bark, peat moss, perlite and vermiculite. A person can mix black dirt with perlite and peat moss and compost, but what's even more important is to make sure the dirt itself is free from fungus. The best way to do this is to sterilize the dirt which, believe it or not, can be done right at home. Stubbe said that heating your dirt in the microwave for roughly five minutes will kill most anything that's in the dirt; however, the odor from doing so is not at all pleasant.

Although poinsettias are very susceptible to fungus, Stubbe said that if you start with a healthy plant, it generally stays healthy. Another threat to your plant can be bugs. Stubbe cautions that it is important to spray your plant for the white fly as it can do the most damage to your plant.

As the next Christmas season approaches, it is good to keep in mind that the deadline for blooms is usually right around Oct. 15. It is at this time that the plant should be receiving at least 12 hours of darkness each day in order for it to be on track to bloom by Christmas. "One thing I would caution is if you take this year's plant, next year it is going to be twice as big," Stubbe stated.