

Poinsettias

By Linda K., member of Naperville Garden Club

'Tis the season for these beautiful, traditional Christmas-time plants! I hope the following will offer you some points on displaying your poinsettias as well as extending their bloom time.

*Select full plants that have deep green leaves all the way to the soil. In the center of each "bloom" are the real flowers. For the longest lasting blooms, these tiny, yellow buds should be unopened.

*Since poinsettias are warm weather, somewhat tropical plants, be sure to cover them well when you bring them home from the store.

*Once at home, locate them in a well lit room, away from the cold drafts of opening doors, the dry air of heat vents and the direct heat of the fire place.

*Keep your plant just barely moist, allowing the soil surface to become dry to the touch before watering again. Do not allow the plant to sit in any water. You will either need to remove the foil pot cover or put a hole in it to allow the excess water to drain into a saucer. Yellowing or dropping leaves is a sign of over watering and root rot.

*Mist your plant with water every few days during flowering to help the leaves retain their moisture.

*When displaying your plant, try something a little different this year. Remove the foil and possibly a few lower leaves and place in a decorative container. Stick some holly or evergreen stems in the soil or "mulch" with reindeer moss, cranberries, crabapples or decorative stones.

Poinsettias can also be used as cut flowers, so you might want to buy a few extra plants to cut.

*Several of our Cup Of Cheer houses have featured blossoms cut short and quickly dipped into melted paraffin/candle wax to seal the stem. The blossoms will last a few days and are good for incorporating into a table or mantle garland or tucking into a tree as a "live ornament" for a special party.

*For longer lasting cut poinsettia blooms, leave a long stem when cutting the flower. Remove the green leaves and put it in a vase of cool water for 30 to 45 minutes. Discard the milky water and fill the vase with fresh cool water, or put the stem into a florist's pick with water. The blossoms will stay fresh for nearly 2 weeks (Better Homes and Gardens, 12/04).

*To add variety to your display, try filling your vase of water with crabapples, cranberries or rose hips. You won't see the stems and the fruit will help your blooms stay in place

If you want to try your hand at making this year's poinsettia plant bloom again next year, here are some instructions from Schaefer Greenhouses, Inc.: When the leaves have fallen, cut back the stems to 4 inches. The soil should be kept almost dry and the pot placed in a mild, shady location. In early May water and repot the plant, removing some of the old soil. Continue watering and shoots will soon appear. Feed regularly and remove some of the new growth, leaving 4-5 strong new stems. From the end of September, careful light control is essential. Cover with a black polythene bag in the early evening and remove the next morning so the plant is kept in total darkness for 14 hours. Continue doing this daily for 8 weeks, then return to normal plant treatment. Your poinsettia will again be in bloom at Christmas time, but it will be taller than the plant you bought.

Members of Naperville Garden Club write this monthly gardening article for area homeowner association newsletters. Our hope is that your interest in gardening will be piqued and that we can pass along some new and valuable information. This is a civic project for our club and we sincerely hope you will enjoy the articles. The Naperville Garden Club meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month. If you are interested in visiting one of our meetings or have any questions, please visit our web site at www.napervillegardenclub.org.