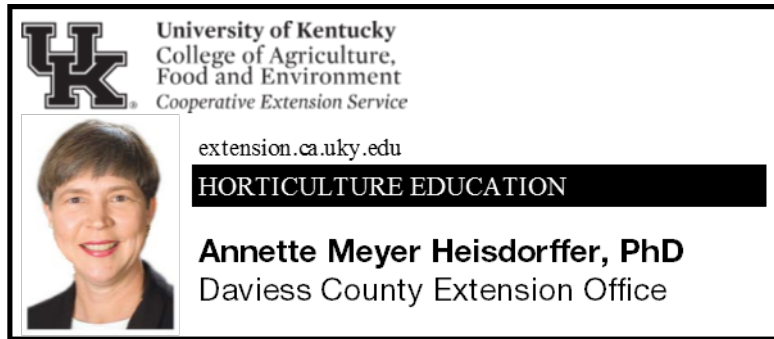


# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



November 19, 2022

## Poinsettias Add Cheer to the Holiday Season

The hunt begins again for the perfect poinsettia for Mom for the holidays! I love to see her smile as the poinsettia is placed on the special table in the living room. Dad and the rest of the family enjoy this beautiful plant as well.

The poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) was discovered in Mexico by Robert Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico. As an amateur botanist from Greenville, South Carolina, he was fascinated with the plant. He sent the first poinsettias back to the United States in 1825. The wild plants from Mexico grew 12 to 15 feet tall. The bracts with the red color were narrow and droopy with a large open center. Today's plants are more compact and suitable for displaying indoors.

The tradition of associating the poinsettia with Christmas probably started in the 1800s by missionaries to Mexico, who used brightly colored poinsettias in nativity processions. The poinsettia was cultivated by the Aztecs for medicinal purposes and as a dye.

It is important to note that the poinsettia is not poisonous to people or pets. The

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

poinsettia is classified as non-edible and may cause major discomfort if consumed. Scientific research conducted at several universities showed no toxicity, no behavioral changes, and no mortality, even at extremely high doses. All non-edible plant materials should be kept out of reach of curious children or pets in the home.

Also, people with an allergy to latex may be allergic to poinsettias, according to information from the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service. Poinsettias produce a white milky sap when the leaves are damaged. The severity of the reaction depends on the person. Ask the recipient about allergies before giving them as a gift.

Poinsettias are available in many colors. The showy red, pink, or white portions, commonly referred to as the "flower," consist of modified leaves called bracts. The yellow center is really the flower part.

The red poinsettia is most frequently used for decoration. However, several colors are available. Colors range from white to creamy white through shades of pink to punch, and cranberry red and orange red to traditional red. With colors so vivid, some are referred to as hot pink. Even purple and chartreuse poinsettias have been developed.

Poinsettias with bracts that have two to three colors are available. Marble is a description of the bracts having marbled pink and white colors. Jingle bells describes pink flecks on red bracts. Another cultivar has different tones of cream, rose, and pink on each bract.

Winter Rose is a unique cultivar of poinsettia. The red bracts are puckered and curled under. This makes the bracts bunch together causing them to look like a mass of flower petals.

When buying a poinsettia, choose a plant with small, tightly clustered, yellow buds in the center. The buds should be closed tightly with a green or red tip. Plants with wide open buds

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

and pollen present are more mature. If the yellow buds are missing, the plant is older and will not last as long. Also, look for dark green leaves, colored bracts, and no wilted or yellow leaves.

Once brought home, give poinsettias optimum growing conditions to increase the life of the plant, which include sunlight and adequate water. Poinsettias require a bright, sunny location. Ideally, the foliage needs an hour or more of sunlight each day.

Water the plant regularly as needed when the soil becomes dry to the touch. Do not allow the pot to sit in water. The plant's roots will begin to rot if over-watered which shortens the life of the plant. Make sure to pour the excess water out of the pot cover or place a container under the pot and poke a hole through the cover for water to drain out. Remember to dump out the excess water in the container.

Keep poinsettias out of drafts and away from heat sources such as appliances, radiators, and fireplaces because they dry out the plants. Avoid putting them on top of appliances that emit heat. A cool location in the house with sunlight available keeps the bracts colorful for a couple of months after the holidays have passed.

After January 1, fertilize the poinsettia once a month with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer. Keep the plant growing with adequate light and water for continued enjoyment.

Remember that poinsettias do not like cold temperatures. The plant may be injured if exposed to 50 degrees F or lower. Keep this in mind when finding a location for the plant after Christmas.

If you would like to keep your poinsettia and try to make it bloom next year, there is information available through the Cooperative Extension Service. Remember, it takes time and

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

dedication to get a poinsettia to bloom again. If you want to count on having a beautiful poinsettia for the Christmas season, purchase it from a greenhouse or nursery.

Enjoy the poinsettia this holiday season. For more information about poinsettias, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

## **Annette's Tip:**

When snow accumulates on shrubs and trees, leave it on the plants. Brushing the snow off causes damage to the plant because the frozen branches bend back up after the weight is removed and the ice within the cells of the branches breaks the water-conducting tissue inside the stem. The damage usually shows up in the summer when the demand for water uptake is greatest.

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability. UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY, KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND KENTUCKY COUNTIES, COOPERATING