

Question:

Every year I receive at least one Poinsettia plant over the holidays. I always tell myself to keep the plant until the next holiday season, but the plant dies soon after the holidays. How can I keep my poinsettia alive from year to year? Can I plant it in my garden?

Answer:

The Poinsettia plant, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, is a tropical plant, native to Mexico. Here in San Diego, we have many microclimates, with some more amenable to growing Poinsettias outdoors as landscape plants. If you live in a mild (no frost) area, you can probably grow a Poinsettia outdoors.

If you are picking out a Poinsettia for yourself, choose carefully. First, look for plants that have their little flowers in the center. The older plants will not have these, and most big box stores will be stocked with older plants. Try to buy one with many stems if you want to replant it. It might cost more but will help extend the life of the plant.

When you first bring your Poinsettia home, remove the decorative foil and keep the plant in a warm, sunny, south or east facing location. Water your plant when the soil feels dry but avoid overwatering, as this will cause root rot. Don't fertilize your plant until springtime.

When spring arrives, prune off the bracts, leaving 4 inches of the stem. The bracts are the leaves of the Poinsettia that change color depending on light exposure. Begin fertilizing with a water-soluble fertilizer about every two weeks. Poinsettia flowers are made up of the bracts, which look like petals, and the tiny yellow flowers in the center, called cyathia. The colorful bracts attract insects to the flowers and will drop after pollination.



When temperatures start warming up and there is no chance of frost, you can move your plant outside to a partly shady location. After two weeks, you can move the plant to a full sun location.

If you want your Poinsettia to flower year after year, you will want to plant it in an area where it receives full sun during the day and no light at all at night. If it receives any light at night during the flowering period (October and November), the flowering may be interrupted and therefore be unsuccessful.

Maintain your Poinsettia by keeping it in a well-draining fertile soil and do not overwater. Fertilize and prune to keep it looking healthy.