



December Tip of the Month Poinsettia Care

A charming story is told of Pepita, a poor Mexican girl who had no gift to present to the Christ Child at Christmas Eve services. As Pepita walked sorrowfully to church, her cousin Pedro tried to console her. "Pepita," he said, "I am certain that even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes." Pepita gathered a bouquet of common weeds from the roadside, for this was the only gift she could give. As she entered the chapel and approached the altar, her spirits lifted. Forgetting the humbleness of her gift, the girl laid the weeds at the feet of the Christ Child. Suddenly, Pepita's ordinary weeds burst into brilliant red blooms! This miraculous event was named the Flores de Noche Buena, or flowers of the Holy Night. Today we call these flowers poinsettias.

The old wives' tale that poinsettias are poisonous is simply not true. The Society of American Florists and the Ohio State University conducted a scientific investigation disproving the charge that they are harmful. In fact, the Poisondex Information Service states that over 500 leaves ingested by a 50-pound child would demonstrate no toxicity. Of course, like all ornamental plants, it is NOT for human consumption.

Secrets to Success

Place the poinsettia in a location that is well-lit, free from drafts, and moderate in temperature (not less than 55 to 65 degrees F). Poinsettias enjoy moist soil. Water frequently to keep the plant from drying out. Mist the leaves during flowering. Dry air and a warm room can cause loss of flower heads and/or browning or yellowing of the leaf margins. Cold drafts or poor light can also cause leaf loss. Wilting followed by leaf loss can be caused by either overwatering or under watering.

Blooms for Next Year

Poinsettias can be made to bloom again the following season. Careful attention to lighting is crucial to this challenging process. In May or early June, cut the plant back by one third. Feed the plant once or twice a month and continue watering.

Starting the first week of September, cover the plant with a large box (or place in a light-tight closet) each evening and remove the box the next morning. Make sure the plant gets 14 hours of uninterrupted darkness and 10 hours of light each day. Once the colored bracts appear – typically in late November – move the poinsettia to where you'll enjoy it most.