

AFTER THE PARTIES

BY DAN BULKOWSKI, GARDENS AND GREENHOUSE MANAGER

So, its December 27th. All of the cleanup has been done and the holiday guests have left. Except for one, it is still lingering on the shelf by the TV. What to do about Mr. Poinsettia? Well, there are options on how to handle him. The first one is to take him to the curb with the leftovers (or compost pile). Poinsettias are fairly inexpensive and purchasing one here helps out the Gardens. Though most of us started with house plants as we began our gardening careers, a poinsettia can make a nice one.

I have seen several poinsettias, that with little effort, still maintain their red “flowers” (Alex, what are bracts, or modified leaves) for a long time. At least until early summer. As long as your home is between 65-75 degrees, and the plant is placed near a window that has a decent amount of light the poinsettia will maintain its color. Water is important as well. Underwatering and

overwatering will cause the plant to drop leaves. In the greenhouses, they are watered about every 2-3 days. When I have one at home, I only need to water it about once every 7-10 days. I know when by lifting the plant up. If it feels light it's time, if there is some heft to it, I wait. When I do water, the pot cover is removed and over the sink water is added until it drains from the bottom. The poinsettia is left in the sink for a few minutes to drain, then recovered and placed back by the window. Not too close, any drafts will cause this Mexican native tropical plant to lose some leaves.



The above information will keep your poinsettia house plant alive and looking decent. However, if you want your Mr. Poinsettia to return for the

holidays in his full color, a few additional steps can be taken. Maintain watering and fertilize twice a month. In early June, and again in late July, trim back the stems about 4 inches. That will cause the plant to become a little more fuller. Then, starting October 1 make sure the poinsettia has at least 14 hours of complete darkness every night until Thanksgiving. Mr. P needs short days to start the coloring up process. I'm talking complete darkness. A yard light, a TV on, or any little bit of random light at night will cause it to stay green until Valentine's Day. During this time as well, night time temperatures have to be between 60-70 degrees. Above is a photo of Doug and Pam Badgero's Mr. Poinsettia from last year. Its coloring up nicely, and by the holidays will be in full color display.

With a little proper care, at least one of your holiday visitors can be around as a welcome guest for a while. At least until you get tired of it and put it on the compost pile.