

By David Lott

UNL Horticulturist

What do I do with a poinsettia after the holidays are over? Poinsettias are sought after once they become available around Thanksgiving time. They are wonderful holiday gifts, and are used as decorative accents in the home or office to bring extra color and cheer. As the holiday season ends, consumers wonder what to do with these plants.

Poinsettias don't have to be thrown away once the holiday season is over. Here are some simple care tips during the entire year.

- Place poinsettias where they will receive as much light as possible in the home, away from hot and cold drafts. Avoid placing these plants near vents, fireplaces, doorways, on TV sets or touching cold window glass.
- Keep the plant evenly hydrated, but not soggy. Use purified, bottled or reverse osmosis water to reduce the salt build up. Allow excess water to drain away in a saucer or tray.
- As days become longer, the color of the poinsettia bracts will recede, and the plant will slowly become green again. At this point, the poinsettia will be returning to a growing, vegetative state.
- If the leaves stay intact on the plant, continue to provide light and even moisture. After a couple of weeks, apply blooming plant fertilizer. Follow fertilizer directions completely, applying every two to three weeks.

- If leaves are falling off the plant, do not panic or throw the plant away! Move the plant to a location with plenty of light, in a cooler location, around 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

Avoid placing these plants in a location above 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Let the soil dry out, but not completely. Allow the plants to rest until April or May in this state.

- Trim back these resting plants to 3 to 5 inches in height in late April or May. Place them in a warm, sunny location, with even moisture to prevent the plant from drying out. New growth will emerge from the cut back plant. Pinch new shoots back once they reach 4 to 6 inches in length to encourage a fuller, well rounded plant.
- Once the air temperature consistently reaches 60 degrees Fahrenheit in the spring, move the plants outside in a shady area to acclimate and avoid sunscald.
- After two or three weeks of acclimation, plant the potted plants, pot and all, in a sunny location with well draining soil.
- Rotate the plant to promote even plant growth. Pinch back new growth 1 to 2 inches once shoots are 4 to 6 inches long. Continue pinching back growth until late August.
- When fall night temperatures dip to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, move the poinsettia in its container back inside the home in a sunny location.

Contact me at dlott2@unl.edu, by calling (308) 532-2683, or by contacting your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Office.

David Lott is the Horticulture Extension Educator with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in North Platte.

