

### **By David Lott**

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Shipments of poinsettias and Norfolk Island pine are now for sale at retail stores and nurseries. This sure sign of the coming holiday season excites consumers to purchase these plants for friends, loved ones and themselves to decorate homes and work places. Before we take these plants home or to give them as gifts to others, do we know how to take care of them?

Many times, poinsettias and Norfolk Island pine suffer from neglect or incorrect care when the recipients of these plants do not know how to take care of them. In-depth news stories can be written about these plants, but for the sake of simple care tips, here are simple suggestions that can be used to help both plants survive the holiday season in the home or the office.

Check when the poinsettia and Norfolk Island pine were shipped to the local store or nursery. Select fresh plants that have recently arrived in the best possible condition.

For transit, cover these plants with a roomy shopping bag or plastic sleeve over the top without breaking plant bracts or branches. The goal is to reduce cold drafts and a sudden temperature change when transporting the plants in the car to the home or office.

Remove the plastic sleeves or bags as soon as possible when the plant arrives at its destination.

Remove or punch holes in the bottom of the foil or decorative plastic sleeve on the bottom of the pot so water will drain away when the plant is watered.

Leaving decorative sleeves on the containers without drainage can cause a buildup of ethylene gas around the plant, causing premature leaf (bract), blossom and leaf drop.

Place poinsettias in a brightly-lit location away from cold windows and drafts.

Norfolk Island pine prefer a location with indirect light away from cold windows and drafts for most of each day. For best results, choose a location that also provides a few hours of direct light each day for growth and vigor.

Avoid placing these plants on or near TV sets, heat vents, or fireplaces to avoid rapid drying out of the potting material and the plant.

Check the moisture level of the potting mixture often to avoid excessive drying, even in the preferred locations for each plant.

Sterilized or drinking water is recommended for watering both plants, reducing salt buildup in the plants and potting media, extending the health of the plants over time.

Water the plants until the water drains out of the bottom of the container. This can be done in a sink or bathtub until all the excess moisture has left.

Use drip trays or saucers to catch any excess water that could mark or ruin furniture. Dump out any excess water.

If anyone would like any specific care information on poinsettias or Norfolk Island pine, or if you have any questions about holiday plant care tips, please contact me at [dlott2@unl.edu](mailto:dlott2@unl.edu), by calling (308) 696-6781, or by contacting your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Office.

Have a great week!