

Growing Poinsettias in the Landscape

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With their beautiful hues of reds and whites, poinsettias typically signify that the winter holidays are approaching. These colorful plants are often given as gifts and used as decorations in the home or office. Here are some interesting facts about poinsettias. The poinsettia's showy "flowers" are actually a cluster of modified leaves called bracts. The true flowers are small and clustered in the center of the bracts. Despite popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous, but the latex in their milky sap can be irritating to some.



Do you hate tossing the plant in the garbage at the end of the season? Poinsettias can be planted in the landscape and provide a beautiful display year after year. With that being said, you may have tried to grow your poinsettia inside your office or in the landscape and ended up with a leggy or dead plant. Follow these strategies to increase your plant's chance of survival.

If you are getting a poinsettia with the thought of planting it in the yard, it is best to purchase the plant in mid-November since these early flowering varieties are ones that will also bloom earliest in the landscape. With a late flowering variety, blooming may be interrupted by cold weather in the landscape.

Once you have your poinsettia home, enjoy the blooms and keep the plants in a bright area and water whenever the soil is dry. Although those decorative sleeves may be pretty, take them off because it will keep the plant soggy and cause it to decline. Don't add any fertilizer, just keep it happy and green (and inside) until the last frost is over around March. After that time, you can transition the plant to the outside by cutting the stem down to 4-6 inches on each branch and placing the pot in a shady area for a couple of weeks. If you prefer to keep the plant in a pot, just replant it to a larger pot and follow the same guidelines.

Once it is acclimated, choose a sunny, well-drained area that will not receive any artificial light at night, so don't plant them under your window, near security lights, or by the streetlights. Poinsettias bloom when there are longer periods of darkness for several weeks. If it senses light during the night, then it will mess up its internal clock. Make sure you pick a large enough area because poinsettias become a large shrub in the landscape. Plant it to the same depth as it was in the pot, mulch, and keep it moist. It is very important to keep it moist at all times and not dry out while it's in the landscape. If it dries out, some of the lower leaves will drop off.

Prune it back to about 12 to 18 inches from the ground around Memorial Day and Labor Day, leaving 4 leaves on each stem. This will allow it to develop into a more compact plant and not become leggy. Fertilize it with a slow-release fertilizer each time you prune. Hopefully by October, you will start to see the first bit of color in the leaves and a lovely display by the holidays. If this sounds too complicated, then you are probably better off throwing the poinsettia out with the Christmas tree.

For more information on growing poinsettias in the landscape, visit the EDIS document on the topic at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep349>. To purchase spectacular traditional and novelty poinsettias, visit the University of Florida's Environmental Horticulture Club's Annual Poinsettia Fundraiser on December 10th from 8am-5pm and December 11th from 8am-3pm at Fifield Hall on Hull Road in Gainesville. Ask for the ones that would be good in the landscape if that is your intention. For more information on the poinsettia sale, visit <https://sites.google.com/site/ufhortclub/poinsettia-sale>.