



ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest. Email or mail your questions to:

info@sprigsandtwigs.net or

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Question #1 this Week: *I love Poinsettias at this time of year, and I've always wondered if the growers paint them red? ...Sarah*

Linda's Answer: Although you may see Poinsettias, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, decorated with glitter and painted wild colors, there are over 100 natural varieties that come in various shades of red, burgundy, white, pink and marbled. The colored part is actually not a flower but a modified leaf. Poinsettias, a perennial shrub that was once considered a weed, are native to Mexico where they can grow 10-15 feet tall. They were named in honor of



Joel Roberts Poinsett, a botanist, physician and the first United States Ambassador to Mexico, who brought them into this country in 1828. They were commercialized in the early 1900s in southern California, which now produces about half of the world's supply of Poinsettias. Poinsettias are the most popular Christmas plant and, in fact, are the best-selling potted plant in the United States and Canada. In Mexico and Guatemala they are known as the Flower of the Holy Night (Christmas Eve).

Getting your Poinsettia to develop colored bracts next year isn't hard, but you must be diligent. The colored bracts are created through a process called photoperiodism. From October 1 until early December, the plant must have completely dark nights of 12-15 hours long and bright sunny days. Around November 1, you will notice the bracts starting to turn red and by early December, they should be all red. The bracts should stay bright for a few weeks beyond Christmas and eventually they will brown and fall off. At that point, cut the stems back to about 6", keep the plant warm indoors and the soil fairly dry. When the outside temperatures are consistently 60 degrees and above, you can move the Poinsettia outside to a spot with indirect sun, put it in a slightly larger pot and fertilize and water normally. When the weather cools off, bring it inside and on October 1, repeat the process all over again. Good Luck and Happy Holidays!

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

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