

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:
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QUESTION THIS WEEK:

Hi Linda, I remember an article you wrote about Poinsettias last Christmas I know I cut it out of the paper, but I can't seem to find it. Can you re-run it? Thank you.....Rene, Clinton, CT

Linda's Answer:

Hello Rene- At this time of year, we see Poinsettias, (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*), decorated with glitter and painted wild colors in many shops and garden centers all over. In addition to the hand painted poinsettias, there are over 100 natural varieties that come in various shades of red, burgundy, white, pink and marbled. Poinsettias have been nicknamed the 'Lobster Flower' because of their color, but the colored part is not a flower at all but modified leaves called bracts. Poinsettias are a perennial shrub that was once considered a weed and they are native to Mexico where they can grow 10-15 feet tall. Poinsettias 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. (Here's a holiday trivia question for you: Why does the word Poinsettia always start with a capital "P"? Answer: Because they are named after a person!) Poinsettias were commercialized in the early 1900s in southern California, which now produces about half of the world's supply of Poinsettias. They are the most popular Christmas plant and, in fact, are the single 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).



If you want to try to get 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 22 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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