KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Fun Facts About Poinsettias”

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Do you like trivia, or at least learning more about the top-selling holiday plant? If so, perhaps you will be interested in several fun facts about the poinsettia plants you buy and see everywhere each December.

Fact 1: Did you know that the poinsettia's main attraction is not its flowers, but its leaves? The flowers of the plant are the yellow clustered buds in the center (termed “cyathia”). The colored leafy parts are actually bracts or modified leaves that turn color in response to the plant forming flowers. When buying a poinsettia, make sure it has the buds, preferably not yet open.

Fact 2: Red is the most popular color, accounting for roughly three-quarters of all sales nationwide, followed by white and pink. The more than 100 varieties of poinsettias come in a range of colors from red, salmon, and apricot to yellow, cream, and white. If you see a blue one, these are a designer color created with dyes. There are also unusual speckled or marbled varieties with several colors blended together. New varieties are introduced yearly.

Fact 3: How many poinsettias do you think are sold in a year? According to the USDA Floriculture Crops report from just a few years ago, poinsettias accounted for about one-fifth (19 percent) of sales of all flowering potted plants. In economic terms, that's $146 million out of a total of $778 million in sales of all flowering potted plants, with about 35 million pots sold.  This makes them the highest selling potted flowering plant.

Fact 4: Although every state in the United States grows poinsettias commercially, California is the top producer with almost 7 million pots grown, followed by North Carolina with 4.3 million pots sold, Texas with 3.3 million, Florida with 3.2 million, and Ohio with 2.9 million poinsettias sold. I think Oregon may just be too cold.

Fact 5: Did you know that in the wild, or planted in tropical climates, the poinsettia can reach heights of 12 feet with leaves measuring six to eight inches across? It is actually a small tropical tree (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) belonging to the Euphorbia plant family.

Fact 6:  A native of southern Mexico, the poinsettia blooms in December and has been used to decorate churches, leaves have been used to dye fabric for clothing and the sap used for

 Fact 7: Dr. Joel Roberts Poinsett, an amateur botanist and first United States Minister (the position called “ambassador” after 1896) to Mexico, introduced the plant that became known as the poinsettia to this country. He discovered a shrub with brilliantly colored red leaves growing by the side of the road in Taxco, Mexico, in December 1828 and sent cuttings home to his plantation in Greenville, South Carolina. He continued to study and breed this plant in his greenhouse, sharing plants with his horticulturist friends. It soon gained acceptance as a holiday plant, despite its very short bloom time. It wasn't until the 1960s that researchers were able to successfully breed plants to bloom more than just a few days.

Fact 8: True or False? The poinsettia is a poisonous plant. If you answered false, you're correct. The plant has been tested repeatedly and cleared of this charge by authorities such as the National Poison Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and the American Medical Association. However, this doesn't mean that poinsettias are meant to be eaten. If ingested, this plant can cause stomach irritation and discomfort. Cats and children also may choke on the fibrous parts, so be sure to keep these plants out of their reach. The sticky white sap also may cause skin irritation for some people.

Fact 9: Do you know the best way to prolong the life of this Christmas plant? Avoid hot or cold drafts, keep the soil moist not soggy, and place in a room with sufficient natural light and temperatures of around 60 to 70 degrees F. Water when the soil begins to dry. Once the leaves wilt too far, it's too late. Above all, protect it from exposure to wind or cold on the way home from the store. Poinsettias are highly sensitive to cold temperatures and even a few minutes of exposure to 50-degrees F or lower temperatures will cause them to wilt. But when cared for properly, poinsettias usually will outlast your desire to keep them!

Fact 10:  Can you get your poinsettia to rebloom the next year, and if so, how?  Yes is the short answer, but it requires some work and regularity. If you want to try though, keep in mind that flowering in this plant responds to short daylengths (or actually long nights).  They need daylight for no more than 10 hours daily, beginning around October 1.  So you’ll need to place plants in a darkened closet or room (with no lights at any time) from about 5pm to 7am or so, daily, for 8 to 10 weeks.   Don’t forget to bring it back into the daylight every day! Even if you are successful, keep in mind that much superior plants will be available from greenhouses and growers, as well as new varieties in all sizes.

For answers to all your garden questions, please visit our website:

Gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good At It. Thanks for listing

Resources:

https://news.aces.edu › Gardening in the South – the christmas flower

<https://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/hort/byg/archive/poinsettia2017.html> - poinsettia history and culture

https:// <https://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/leafdrop.html> - Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor