

## CARING FOR POINSETTIAS

By Andrea Ray Chandler



Your pretty Poinsettia plant will be around for months afterwards, provided you keep it in a place with bright light and no cold drafts (don't set it next to the front door).

These plants are actually Mexican shrubs. In the spring, the bracts (colorful leaves people frequently mistake for flowers), will begin to fade. That will be the time to prune your little shrub back where the branches join each other, leaving an 8 inch-high specimen. Be sure to leave three or four green leaves on each remaining shoot.

Keep them in a sunny location that's protected from frost until mid-May, when it's warm enough to take them outside. Surrounded by summer's warmth and light, it will grow new leaves. In the early summer, transplant your poinsettia into a larger pot, two inches greater in diameter. Be sure the potting mix is rich in organic material, such as peat, and water thoroughly.

When it gets cool again in mid-September, bring the poinsettia back inside. Find a spot with six hours of bright sunlight and 70-degree temperatures.

To bring back the colorful bracts, you need to fool your poinsettia with specific lengths of darkness every day. It will need 14 hours of continuous darkness every night to color up. You can do this by moving it into a dark room, or simply setting a large box atop your potted plant. After 8-10 weeks of this, your poinsettia will be ready for the holidays..

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Andrea Ray Chandler is a lifetime member of TGOA/MGCA and former editor of the Olathe GOA's "Horticultural Highlights". Chandler received the national Golden Quill Award in 1999 for her writing ability; her publications appear in numerous national magazines. In addition to being a mom, volunteer and lecturer, Chandler is a full-time student working on a degree in Horticultural Science.

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