

## EXTENSION NOTES



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### **Prep for Poinsettias – What to Know Before you Grow**

With their bright red, pink or white leaves, poinsettias herald the approach of the holiday season. They are beautiful as stand-alone plants or as components of bigger holiday displays. In the United States, we grow poinsettias as indoor potted plants, most in heated greenhouses, but you might be surprised to know that in its native climate, this subtropical species can grow to more than 10 feet tall.

The person responsible for bringing poinsettias to the United States was Joel Roberts Poinsett, a botanist, physician and the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico. December 12<sup>th</sup> is officially Poinsettia Day and marks the 1851 death of Poinsett.

Growers cultivate more than 100 varieties of poinsettias, but the red leaf variety is the most popular. Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous. The plant was cleared of this charge by the National Poison Center and the American Medical Association. Also, an Ohio State University study found a 50-pound child would have to eat more than 500 leaves to have any harmful effect. Even though the leaves have an awful taste, it's still a good idea to keep pets away from the plants as consumption can cause digestive upset.

More than 34 million poinsettias are sold each year, accounting for about a quarter of the sales of all flowering potted plants. For those who are thinking about taking up mass production, while that may seem like a big money-maker for growers, it is actually a high-risk venture with significant start-up costs, such as building a heated greenhouse, and requires demanding labor and management. The profit margin for most poinsettia growers is low due to the highly competitive marketing environment of wholesale and retail markets like local garden centers, florists and grocers, roadside stands, farmer's markets, fundraisers and direct sales from the farm.

Those interested in producing the plant should also consider the short six-week sale window beginning in early November. Still, growers see a value in producing a crop of poinsettias, because it allows for spreading capital investments over the whole year versus having the greenhouse sit idle during later summer and fall.

In the end, growers who cultivate multiple varieties can distinguish themselves a bit from the competition and have a market advantage.

For more information on poinsettias or other horticulture topics, contact the Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.