

The Grapevine



Poinsettia Care

Modern poinsettia varieties stay attractive for a long time if given proper care. Place your poinsettia in a sunny window or the brightest area of the room, but don't let it touch cold window panes. The day temperature should be 65 to 75 degrees F. with 60 to 65 degrees at night. Temperatures above 75 degrees will shorten bloom life, and below 60 degrees may cause root rot. Move plants away from drafty windows at night or draw drapes between them to avoid damage from the cold. Poinsettias are somewhat finicky in regard to soil moisture. Avoid overwatering because poinsettias do not like "wet feet." On the other hand, if the plant is allowed to wilt, it will drop some leaves. So how do you maintain proper moisture? Examine the potting soil daily by sticking your finger about one-half inch deep into the soil. If it is dry to this depth, the plant needs water. When it becomes dry to the touch, water the plant with lukewarm water until some water

runs out of the drainage hole, then discard the drainage water. (Ward Upham)

Are Poinsettias Poisonous?

At times, an old time rumor is resurrected that poinsettias are poisonous. This is NOT true. Though there may be an allergic reaction to the milky sap, there has never been a recorded case of poisoning. This rumor has been so persistent that members of the Society of American Florists have sought to dispel it by eating poinsettia leaves for the press. The AMA Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants states that the poinsettia "has been found to produce either no effect (orally or topically) or occasional cases of vomiting. This plant does not contain the irritant diterpenes" which is the toxin in other members of the genus Euphorbia to which poinsettia belongs. (Ward Upham)

Ashes in the Garden

You may have heard that using wood ashes on your garden can help make the soil more fertile. Though ashes do contain significant amounts of potash, they contain little phosphate and no nitrogen. Most Kansas soils are naturally high in potash and do not need more. Also, wood ashes will raise the pH of our soils, often a drawback in Kansas where soils tend toward high pH anyway. Therefore, wood ashes add little benefit, and may harm, many Kansas soils. In most cases it is best to get rid of them. (Ward Upham)

Storing Power Equipment for the Winter

Late fall or early winter is a good time to service power equipment such as mowers, tillers and garden tractors. Run the equipment out of gas or treat the existing gas with a stabilizer as untreated gas can deteriorate over time. If using a stabilizer, run the engine long enough for untreated gas in the carburetor bowl to be burned and replaced. This is also a good time to replace the oil (and filter, if present) since the engine is warm. Check and replace the spark plug if necessary. Some gardeners will also apply a light, sprayable oil into the cylinder through the spark plug hole. Check and clean air filters and replace if necessary. Many mowers and tillers will have a foam prefilter that can become filthy with use. If allowed to become too dirty, engines will run poorly or may not run at all. Sharpen blades, clean tines, tighten screws, replace broken parts and do all the other things needed to keep equipment in good shape. Though such maintenance takes some time and effort, it pays for itself by reducing frustration and lost time due to poorly performing equipment during a hectic spring. (Ward Upham)

