

With care, poinsettias can last through the holidays

K-State horticulture expert gives tips on maintaining the popular plant



MANHATTAN, Kan. – For many, the rich color of poinsettias is a comforting symbol of the holidays. With proper care, the popular plant can last through the end of the year and beyond.

Ward Upham, a horticulture expert with K-State Research and Extension, said poinsettias should be kept in a spot where daytime temperatures are 65 to 75 degrees F, and 60 to 65 at night. “Temperatures above 75 will shorten the life of blooms, and below 60 degrees may cause root rot,” Upham said. “Place your poinsettia in a sunny window or the brightest areas of your

room, but don’t let it touch cold window panes. Move plants away from drafty windows at night, or draw the drapes to avoid cold damage.” Upham called poinsettias “finicky” when it comes to soil moisture. “Avoid over-watering poinsettias because they do not like ‘wet feet,’” he said. “On the other hand, if the plant is allowed to wilt (due to not getting enough water), it will drop some leaves.” To maintain proper moisture, Upham suggests sticking a finger about ½ inch deep into the soil. “If it’s dry to ½ inch, the plant needs water,” he said. “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.” K-State Research and Extension has produced a video to help in choosing the best poinsettia: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/choosing-the-best-poinsettia>.

Are poinsettias poisonous?

Despite rumors to the contrary, poinsettia leaves are not poisonous to humans or animals. Upham said that members of the Society of American Florists have tried to dispel the rumors in the past by eating poinsettia leaves at press events.

He said the plant could cause an allergic reaction to the milky sap in the leaves. There has never been a recorded case of poisoning due to a poinsettia, he said. Some members of the genus Euphorbia, to which the poinsettia belongs, have a toxin that can cause vomiting. The poinsettia, however, does not contain that toxin.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with information on these and other horticulture-related topics. The newsletter is or can be delivered by email each week. Find it here: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/newsletters/index.html>

Interested persons can also send questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact the Butler County Research & Extension Office at 316-321-9660.