

# Festive indoor plants for the holiday season

What do gardeners do when we cannot garden outside anymore? We garden inside. Lucky for us, the upcoming holiday season gives us plenty of opportunities and excuses to do just that.

There are many plants that shine in December and just seem to say "Happy Holidays." The most traditional are the poinsettia and Christmas cactus. Thanks to hybridization, new varieties are being added every year to give us color choices beyond red and white.

Other less traditional offerings include Amaryllis, Paper whites, Cyclamen and Orchids. Poinsettias are the most popular flowering plant grown in the United States. They are native to Central America and tropical Mexico, where they are evergreen and grow to a height of eight to 10 feet.

Joel Roberts Poinsett brought them to this country while he was serving as U.S. minister to Mexico from 1825-1829. They were first sold commercially here around 1850. Today more than 50 million plants are sold each year. The actual flowers of the poinsettia are the small yellow blossoms in the center of

the colorful bracts. Contrary to popular belief, they are not poisonous.

Colors include red, white, pink, marbled, burgundy, cream and speckled. I read recently that the new trend is painted poinsettias, although I must admit I have not seen one other than in pictures. Poinsettias require at least six hours of bright, indirect sunlight each day to thrive. They like a moist soil, not too wet and not too dry. Ideal temperatures are 65-70 degrees.

Keep plants away from drafts, excess heat and dry air from appliances fireplaces or ventilating ducts. Temperatures below 50 degrees can cause premature leaf drop, and above 70 degrees may cause the leaves to yellow and fall off and the bracts to fade early.

Poinsettias can also suffer root rot if left in standing water, so it is

advisable to either remove the foil covering or put holes in the bottom to allow for drainage.

There are several legends associated with the poinsettia, but this one is my favorite: A poor Mexican child on her way to church on Christmas Eve wept because she had no gift to give the baby Jesus. An angel appeared and instructed her to gather weeds. When the child arrived at the altar, red "blossoms" popped from each stem.

Christmas Cactus is a popular winter flowering houseplant native to Brazil. The flowers range in color from yellow, salmon, pink, fuchsia and white or a combination of those colors. Because the stems are pendulous, they are a great choice for hanging baskets. They like bright sunlight in midwinter. Do not over water, especially in the winter.

The most common causes of bud

drop are over watering, exposure to cold drafts, or a position too close to a hot radiator or vent.

One of my personal favorites for the holidays and throughout the winter is Amaryllis. They come in many beautiful varieties, including shades of red, white, pink, salmon and orange. There are also many striped and multicolored varieties, double flowered and dwarf and specimen varieties. They are extremely easy to grow. Soaking the roots in lukewarm water for several hours to hydrate them before planting is a helpful, but not required first step.

Plant bulbs in a container that is one to two inches larger in diameter than the base of the bulb, using a good quality potting mix. Plant the bulb up to its neck, being careful not to damage the roots. Clay or ceramic pots work best as the flowers are quite large and may tip a lighter plastic pot over.

Water the bulb and place the potted bulb in a warm place with direct light since heat is necessary for the development of the stems. The ideal temperature is 68-70

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**JEANINE  
RUBERT**

## Poinsettias are perennial favorites

**COPLEY NEWS SERVICE**

Picking a poinsettia isn't as simple as it used to be. America's largest-selling flowering potted plant — we'll take home tens of millions of them before the holidays are over — is aglow in colors ranging from speckled pinks to creamy whites and dusky purples. Even the green leaves are often splashed with ivory or cream.

But the favorite for decorating hearth and home is still the traditional red.

"Seventy percent of the poinsettias we sell are red and that hasn't changed over the years," said Carey Kramer, marketing manager for

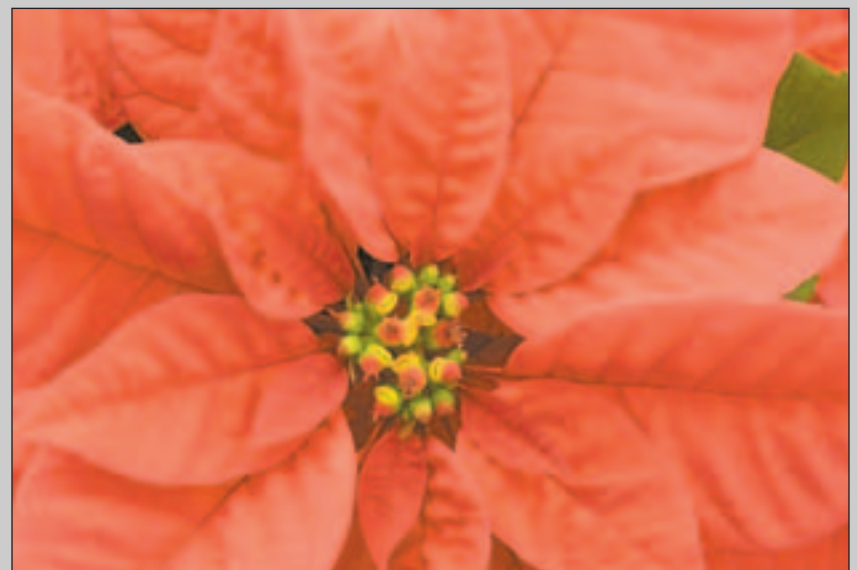
Paul Ecke Poinsettias in Encinitas, Calif., the nation's largest poinsettia propagator. "Pink, white and the novelties make up the rest. Red is just the color most people associate with Christmas."

An upright, dark red Ecke poinsettia called Prestige is popular, as is another red favorite called Freedom.

Still, Ecke and other breeders continue to create colorful new poinsettias for holiday decorating.

A newer variety is Shimmer Pink, with deep pink bracts or colored leaves randomly speckled with cream, and Autumn Red, the earliest flowering poinsettia on the market.

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**Multi-colored poinsettias are becoming more popular.**

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