POINSETTIA

During the winter holiday season, poinsettia have become a traditional flower. The first ambassador to Mexico, J. R. Poinsett, introduced the plant to the United States in the 18th century. *Euphorbia pulcherrima* produce showy, usually scarlet bracts beneath the small yellow flowerlike inflorescences. Albert Ecke and his family have grown poinsettias in southern California for over 60 years as a cut flower.

The poinsettia flower is a very small, yellow flower that grows at the top of the plant. The red, pink, white or mixed bracts grow just below the flower. Flower initiation as well as color in the bract requires a short day and full sunlight. During months with long days, the plants develop leaves and increase stem length. The plants form the flower buds naturally during late September and early October.

Growing Poinsettia

Propagators generally start with rooted stems for planting. Before planting, check size of the pot since it partially determines the size of the full-grown plant. The size of the plant also depends upon the number of plants per pot and greenhouse space allowed for each potted plant.

Pinching poinsettia is a process in which the grower removes the terminal end of the plant. The process is accomplished by taking the top of the plant between the thumb and index finger and carefully breaking the top of the stem completely off. Four or five notes should remain above the soil level. Nodes occur at each point at which a leaf is attached to the stem. After pinching, new shoots will develop from the bud in the axis of the node. The major reason for pinching poinsettias is to increase the number of bracts per plant.

Growth regulators are used to control the mature height of the plant as well as increasing bract color. Regulators are either applied as a drench or as a foliar spray. After the plant absorbs the chemical, the physiology of the plant changes and improves the health and aesthetics of the flower.

Watering should be applied often enough so the plant does not dry out. Either use a water container with a rain-type nozzle or place the plant in water and allow the soil to absorb water through the drainage hole.

After the leaves fall off the stems in winter, cut the plant back to 6 inches above the soil level. Later after new shoot develop, transplant the shoot into a slightly large container and a new soil mix.