

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Poinsettia Care”*

It's that time of year again, many of our favorite stores are decorated in preparation for the upcoming holiday season. There are trees, lights and bows all over town, making for quite a beautiful sight. When most think about holiday plants, I think most of us first think of our beautiful Christmas tree. Although, another common plant associated with this time of year is the poinsettia. Poinsettias can be found just about at every store right now. As common as they are, some might be wondering how to choose plants with confidence and care for them so they won't droop before Santa makes his way down the chimney.

Well have no fear, K-State Research and Extension's state horticulture specialist Ward Upham has some suggestions to keep your poinsettia alive and well through all your holiday gatherings! Begin by choosing a nice plant from the store. This can be done by examining a few details closely. The soil in the pot should be moist, and not waterlogged. Check the undersides of the leaves for insects, and make sure that the green leaves are intact and straight, not dropping over. The poinsettia is probably the most familiar form of a specialized leaf known as a bract. The bracts are bright red, and they surround the very small flowers, which are usually yellow. When shopping for a poinsettia look for the brightest yellow flowers, as those tend to be fresher.

Once you have successfully chosen your poinsettia, the next step is to keep it alive! Poinsettias are extremely sensitive to cold temperatures. Transporting the plant from the retailer to your home really is critical. Any temperature below 50 degrees for any length of time could damage the plant. Many florists will often have a plastic sleeve over them, if you buy one from another retailer, it's not a bad idea to put a bag over it. And then go from the store to your vehicle, and from your vehicle into your house.

Place the plant where it can receive plenty of bright, indirect light. Avoid drafts — cold drafts, warm drafts, all of them. “A place near an outside door is just as bad as a place near an air vent,” Upham said.

Poinsettias prefer temperatures above 60° F, which is, of course, what most people prefer during the winter, too. Perhaps the most challenging tightrope to walk in terms of poinsettia care is water. They are sensitive to either over- or under-watering. Too little water can lead to wilt, which can progress to leaf loss and possibly even some bract loss. Too much water can cause root rot. To avoid watering too soon, stick your finger down into the soil, about half an inch; if the soil is moist, it's fine. Dry soil means the plant needs water, and it needs to be saturated. When you do water, pour on enough so that you see water draining out of the bottom of the pot. If you have a tray or saucer underneath, discard any water that collects there. Many poinsettias are sold with decorative foil surrounding the pot. You'll need to make a hole in the bottom of that foil so that that water can flow into the saucer or tray. Following these instructions, your poinsettia should last several weeks throughout all your holiday festivities.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at [lindsayshorter@ksu.edu](mailto:lindsayshorter@ksu.edu), or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow

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