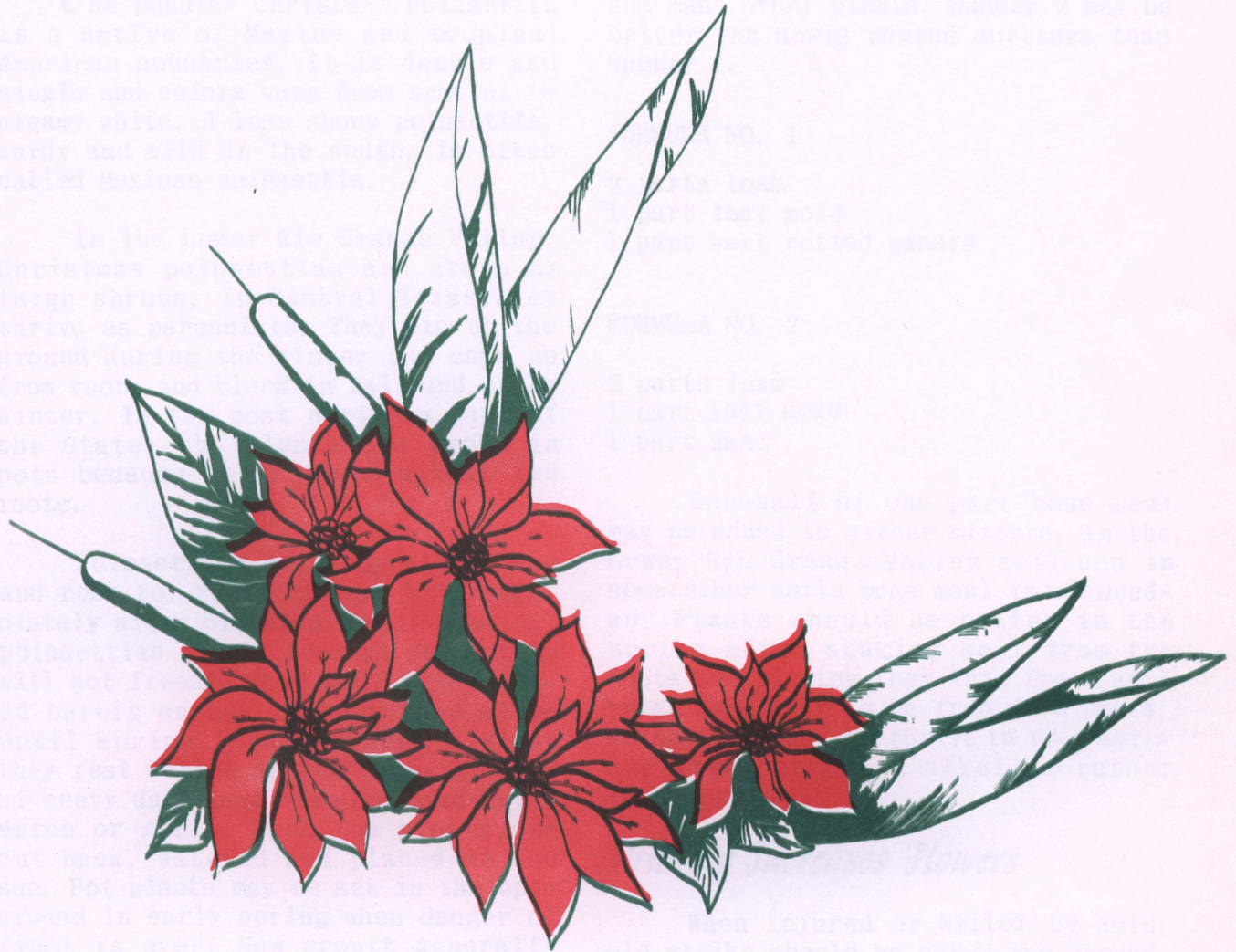


The Poinsettia

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Good Soil Promotes Growth

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The Poinsettia

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The popular Christmas poinsettia is a native of Mexico and tropical American countries. It is double and single and colors vary from scarlet to creamy white. A less showy poinsettia, hardy and wild in the south, is often called Mexican poinsettia.

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Christmas poinsettias are grown as large shrubs. In Central Texas they thrive as perennials. They die to the ground during the winter but come up from roots and bloom in fall and early winter. In the most northern part of the State, the plants are grown in pots because heavy freezes kill the roots.

Poinsettias may drop all leaves and rest for two months or more immediately after blooming. While resting, poinsettias should be kept where they will not freeze. They should be watered barely enough to keep them alive until spring. Some growers believe they rest better in the dark. A cover of heavy dark paper may be used until March or April. Then the plants are cut back, watered and placed in the sun. Pot plants may be set in the open ground in early spring when danger of frost is over. New growth generally begins in March, but this varies with climate, soils and exposure.

Good Soil Promotes Growth

Poinsettias will grow in most soils. A good garden soil is suitable for outdoor planting. Below are two soil formulas for potting poinsettias

and many other plants. Number 2 may be better for newly rooted cuttings than Number 1.

FORMULA NO. 1

2 parts loam
1 part leaf mold
1 part well rotted manure

FORMULA NO. 2

2 parts loam
1 part leaf mold
1 part sand

One-half of one part bone meal may be added to either mixture. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley soil and in some other soils bone meal is not needed. Plants should be potted in the spring after shaking soil from the roots and putting them into fresh soil which is likely to be free from pests. Poinsettias do not thrive in poor soils and grow better in alkaline rather than acid soils.

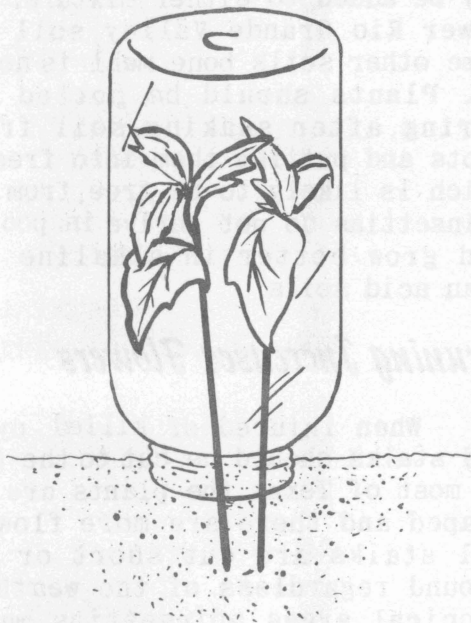
Pruning Increases Flowers

When injured or killed by cold, old stalks should be cut to the ground. In most of Texas the plants are better shaped and there are more flowers if all stalks are cut short or to the ground regardless of the weather. In tropical areas poinsettias may make small trees. After the plants begin to grow in the spring, limb tips should be cut off two or three times to encourage branching. Plants will form

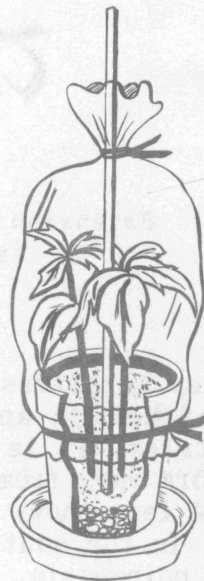
more flowers but the flowers are usually smaller on pruned plants than on plants not cut back. It is not safe to prune after mid-August because late growth may not produce flowers for Christmas.

Mulch Protects Roots

If poinsettias are grown in the open when freezing is predicted the flowers may be cut off for indoor use. The stems can be cut back within two or three buds of the ground and covered with straw or leaves. The colder the climate, the deeper the protecting mulch needs to be. The coverings should be loose enough to allow some air to enter. This may prevent rotting the plant crown. The cut-off limbs may be made into cuttings for rooting new plants. The cuttings of the limbs are easily kept by burying in mulch or loose soil. The cuttings may be planted outside at once and covered with leaves or other mulch. When frost is over, pull the mulch away from the stems and cuttings. Allow the mulch to protect the roots from summer heat and drouth.



A glass jar over new cuttings lessens loss of water and aids in rooting tender tips. Remove jar when cutting is well rooted.



Clear plastic may be used to lessen loss of water from cuttings in a pot.

Cuttings Will Root

Green tips cut off in summer can be made into cuttings. The tenderest tips may be difficult to root outside a greenhouse. A fruit jar or other moisture-holding covers may help the home grower. Summer cuttings are harder to root than stem cuttings made early in the spring or winter from mature wood. Summer cuttings have the advantage of growing into bushier plants. The cuttings should be six or eight inches long and all leaves should be removed, except for a few at the top. Cuttings root well in pots of coarse sand indoors or in half-shade outdoors. Any unfertilized garden soil may be used if no sand is at hand. Green cuttings made before the middle of August can be expected to bloom at Christmas. Two or three cuttings set in one pot or one place make a better showing at Christmas than single plants.

Good Care Improves Plants

Poinsettias need full sunshine. They make weak growth and few blooms if in deep shade. If it is necessary to

grow them in the house, give all the light possible.

Fertilize sparingly until the leaves that turn red (flower bracts) begin to grow. An application of 4-12-4 fertilizer then will help produce large flowers. Use one teaspoon of fertilizer to each 10-inch pot. Outside, fertilize with 1/2 to 1 cup of 4-12-4 fertilizer for each 25 square feet of soil. The amount depends upon the size of the plant. Use more for large plants.

Inside, poinsettias should be protected from sudden temperature changes. For best development they should not be exposed to less than 60 degrees F. If the plants are grown in pots, they should be watered regularly from March to January or the leaves may fall off. Changing from one position to another and changing to different light exposures sometimes causes leaves to fall.

Cut Flowers Need Care

To prevent loss of sap and wilting of cut flowers, seal the cut stems. Burn with a match or gas flame or place cut ends in boiling water for one minute. Some people use ice cubes and some press freshly cut stems into loose soil to stop the flow of sap. If cut flowers wilt, put all of the stems into a large tub of water until fresh and crisp. Leaves when not wanted should be cut from stems a day or more before the flowers are cut. Sap runs out where each leaf is cut but seals over in a short time.

Control Insects and Diseases

Mealy bugs may be taken off by hand, washed off with a stream of water or killed with nicotine sulphate and soap suds spray or malathion spray.

Root Aphids may be controlled by covering all roots with soil and packing tightly or by dusting pots with



Place freshly cut stems into boiling water to seal the ends and stop loss of sap.

nicotine dust or lindane or malathion dust or spray.

Curl - Burn the plants when stems, flower parts and leaves curl at the ends, turn yellow and become badly shaped. No control is known.

Chlorosis - When leaves are yellow with green veins, the plant may be poorly nourished. Apply a 6-inch application of well rotted manure, rotted leaves or rotted straw. A mixture of 1 cup of sulphur and 1/4 cup copperas scattered over 25 sq. ft. and worked into the soil often helps to correct iron deficiency.

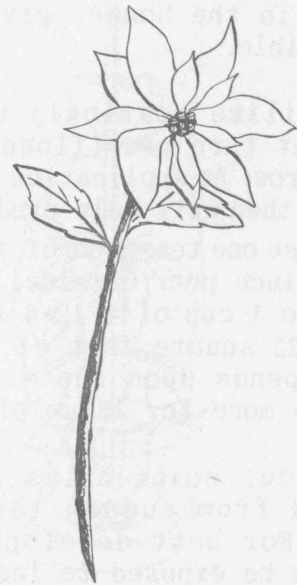
Root Rot kills poinsettias. Use prevention because no cure is known. Soil fumigation with D.D. according to manufacturer's directions will clear the soil of root rot and nematodes. After 60 days start new plants from limb cuttings. Do not transplant roots nor rooted plants from root infected soil. Grow poinsettias in soil where only grasses have grown for five years or more as one preventive measure. If noticed when first wilting, cuttings may be made from the stems and new plants started. Water-



Many leaves make it difficult to arrange poinsettias for indoor use.

ing deeply in connection with the sulfate of ammonia treatment (1/4 pound per square yard) often helps plants live in spite of root rot.

Gray Mold - Give house plants plenty of light and ventilation. Remove outside plants from shade. Dust with sulphur or spray with insoluble copper fungicide.



Most of the leaves may be removed a day or two before cutting the flowers.

Good soil, plenty of water, good drainage, and plenty of sunshine aid poinsettias in resisting root rot and other diseases. Avoid planting them in soil known to be infested with diseases such as crown gall, wilt, collar-rot and stem rot. Avoid soils with cotton root rot unless the soil is given the D.D. fumigation treatment 60 days prior to planting.

