

Yeovil Allotments Association

Birth Flowers for

December

Ponsettia & Holly

Composited off the Internet

by

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Poinsettia



Poinsettias are one of our most popular Christmas houseplants – and frequently given as Christmas gifts. There's no doubt that they provide a bright, cheery festive feel to any home and a colourful centrepiece.

They are the most colourful of any Euphorbia we grow and, as its species name pulcherrima suggests: 'the most beautiful'.

Poinsettias are grown for their large leafy bracts, which surround the real flowers, the small insignificant yellow 'blobs' at the centre.

Although red is still the most common and traditional colour, white, pink and bicoloured/marbled varieties are also available.

The milky sap that comes from cut poinsettia stems may cause skin irritation, in the form of a rash, if you have sensitive skin and come into contact with the sap.

HOW TO GROW POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias need a position in bright, but filtered light, away from strong sunlight. They need a minimum temperature of 13-15°C (55-60°F), but away from sources of direct heat – such as an open fire or radiator – and away from draughts.

POINSETTIA VARIETIES

There are numerous named varieties of poinsettias, although most suppliers rarely provide the name – you simply buy them on the colour of their bracts. But here are some of the best ones.

- **Chianti:** Rich, wine-coloured bracts.
- **Cortez Series:** Cortez Burgundy, deep plum; Cortez Electric Fire, red; Cortez White; Cortez Candy, pink.

- **Lemon Snow:** Pale yellow bracts.
- **Marblestar:** Pink bracts with white margins. Red Velvet
Dusky pink bracts.
- **Silver Star:** Dusky pink bracts and variegated
leaves. Sonora White Glitter Red bracts with white splashes.

Planting poinsettias

Poinsettias aren't too fussy about their compost, but use a good multi-purpose such as **John Innes No 3 Compost** (3 parts to 1 part grit) or **a multi-purpose with added John Innes**.

Only repot plants to the next size pot in spring.

Suggested planting locations and garden types

Houseplant, indoor plant, summer patio plant.

How to care for poinsettias

Care for poinsettias starts when you buy them. Because they are sensitive to cold and winds, which can damage the foliage and cause it to drop prematurely, never buy one from an outdoor market or garage forecourt.

Always ask the shop to wrap the plant in a houseplant wrapper, including over the top of the foliage, to protect it.

Wherever possible, try to buy British. British-grown poinsettias are grown 'hard', which makes them tougher than those grown in many European countries, which are more susceptible to adverse conditions. Ask in the shop if theirs are British poinsettias.

Water poinsettias sparingly, aiming to keep the compost moist – allow the top of the compost to slightly dry out before watering again – as overwatering will damage them. Always use tepid water – never cold water direct from the tap.

Feed fortnightly with **a high potash plant food** – or use one of the feed drippers available from garden centres.

Mist plants regularly to increase humidity around the plants or, better still, stand pots on trays of moist hydroleca or Hortag to help increase humidity.

Getting plants to colour up again

Many people dispose of their poinsettia plants after the festive season and when the bracts start to drop or lose their colour. But it is possible to get the bracts to colour up again for the following year – although it can be a bit of a tricky process. Cut back the stems to 10-15cm (4-6in) in April.

Repot the plants into a slightly bigger pot and grow them on in a light, cool place at a temperature of 15-18°C (60-65°F). They can even be put outdoors in summer, on a sheltered patio, once temperatures reach at least 15°C (60°F).

Bract colouring is brought on by short winter day length. From October/November onwards, plants need 12 hours of complete darkness every day, for a period of 8 to 10 weeks. So place the plants in a dark cupboard or cover them with a cardboard box or light-proof bag. Even one night of missing this dark treatment or accidentally exposing them to light, can

stop/hinder the colouring process. Plants need a constant temperature of about 18°C (55°F) to colour up well.

Flowering season(s)	Winter
Foliage season(s)	Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
Sunlight	Partial shade
Soil type	Loamy
Soil pH	Neutral
Soil moisture	Moist but well-drained
Ultimate height	Up to 60cm (2ft)
Ultimate spread	Up to 45cm (18in)
Time to ultimate height	1-2 years

Holly

How to Plant & Grow **Holly**

Holly plants are essential additions to your garden, especially for festive displays. These can appear anywhere from small shrubs to large climbers.

If you're new to growing Hollies, then you're in the right place. We hope this guide helps you learn how to grow and maintain your Holly shrubs like a pro.



When to Plant Holly

Container-grown Hollies can be planted at any time of year, but preferably in autumn, winter and spring. Avoid planting when the ground is frozen or waterlogged.



Where to Plant Holly

Holly shrubs can be grown in well-drained soil in sun or shaded areas of the garden. They thrive in moist soil but not waterlogged.

How to Plant Holly

Planting Holly from pots into borders Pot-grown plants are incredibly easy to plant and grow. Whether you're growing them directly outside into the border or into a container, our pot-grown plants are a breeze from the moment they arrive.

- Prepare the soil before planting with plenty of organic matter, like compost, before planting. This helps the soil retain moisture, helping your Holly thrive.
- Water the plant well before planting it in place so that the stress on the plant is minimalised.
- Dig a hole in the border that's twice the width of the root system, and as deep as it was in its pot.
- Wedge in the plant by adding soil to the gaps in the hole, firming down the surface to ensure it's in place.
- Water in well, and you're done!

Planting Holly into Containers

- Choose a container that is slightly larger than the original container.
- Fill the pot with your compost of choice.
- After two or three years, the roots fill the pot, which

means it's time to repot it into a slightly larger container in spring.

When to Water Holly

For the first few years, water Holly shrubs in dry spells throughout spring and summer. Once they have established, they are drought tolerant and won't need watering as often, except for particularly dry spells in summer to help produce healthy growth.



Cross-pollinating Holly

If you're after those bright, colourful winter berries, then a bit of work needs to go into planting and planning for this.

These berries are produced on female plants. However, they can only do this if you have both the male and female plants close by each other, as the male plant pollinates the other.

Pruning Holly

Hollies can be cut back or lightly trimmed, whatever you prefer. They can be trimmed into hedges of formal shapes or left to do whatever they fancy. To prune holly shrubs, do this in late summer before the new growth becomes wood-like.

Propagating Holly



**If you're looking
to propagate**

your holly shrub, you can do this from seed. Collect their seeds from the berries they produce in winter, removing the flesh and rinsing the seeds. Plant them in compost and leave them outside to germinate. You can also take semi-ripe cuttings in late summer when you do your pruning or hardwood cuttings in winter.

Common Diseases and Pests

Hollies can be usually pest and trouble-free. However, they can be affected by one issue: leaf blight.

This is a fungal infection that affects the leaves, causing discolouration and lack of growth. It thrives in damp and cold conditions. Unfortunately, there is no treatment, but if you notice any symptoms of this infection then cut off the area and burn the trimming to prevent spread.

When do Hollies flower?

Holly shrubs can produce tiny red berries in winter, lasting throughout the season. The female plants produce these red berries but need a male plant to cross-pollinate them. See our above section on cross-pollination for more information.