YARD & GARDEN NEWSLETTER- JANUARY 2016

Poinsettias Can Flower Next Year

Sandra Mason, Extension Educator, University of Illinois
(Compiled by Dianne Wagner, MNRV Master Gardener)

There are two possibilities as to what to do with poinsettias after Christmas. One is to know that you have appreciated and enjoyed your flowering plant and now you can let the poinsettia die. The second possibility is to keep the poinsettia and help it to flower again. Getting poinsettias to re-flower next year is possible, but it takes diligence. If you are interested, here is the process.

**Winter** - After Christmas, grow the poinsettia as a houseplant. Keep it evenly moist and in fairly bright light.

**Spring** - In February or early March cut back each of the old flowering stems 4- to 6-inches in height to promote new growth.

**Summer** - In May repot into a slightly larger pot. Water well and place in a sunny window. When all danger of frost has passed and night temperatures are above 60°F, the plant can be placed outdoors in a shady location. Sink the pot in a protected outdoor flowerbed. Some morning sun is okay.

Periodically turning the poinsettia pot will prevent rooting through the bottom hole and will keep the plant’s shape more uniform.

Pinch out the top one-fourth inch of the growing shoots to encourage branching for a short plant with many flowers. Do this in three to four week intervals, according to the speed of growth. Two or three large, fully expanded leaves should be left below the pinch; this serves as a guide for knowing when the shoots are ready for pinching. Continue this practice until mid-August, when the plant should have a satisfactory shape and number of shoots.

Keep the plants growing actively all summer by regular watering and fertilizing every two weeks with a complete soluble fertilizer (20-20-20).

**Fall and Winter** - Before night temperatures fall below 55-60°F at night, lift the pot and drench the leaves and soil with water to help remove any pests. Bring the poinsettia indoors to a sunny location. Keep moist but reduce fertilization.

With poinsettias, as well as Christmas cactus and kalanchoe, flowering is "photoperiodically" induced. This means that flowers begin to form when the days are a certain length, or, more accurately, when the nights are long enough. The poinsettia is a short-day or long-night plant. Without long nights, poinsettias will continue to produce leaves but will not flower.

Very short periods of lighting at night may be enough to prevent or interfere with flowering. Even light from a streetlight can stop flowering. If the plant is to be grown in a room that is lighted nightly, cover it completely at dusk every day with a heavy paper bag, a piece of opaque black cloth, other light/tight cover or place in a dark closet. However, they must receive light during the day.
Flower initiation begins in late September and early October. Dark periods longer than 12 hours are necessary for flower set.

Because flower initiation depends upon the length of the dark period, your poinsettia must be kept completely dark from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. In order to get them in flower at Christmas, this treatment should be from the end of September until December 15.

Once you can see the flowers developing and the bracts show color, it is not as important to continue giving the dark period, though it is advisable to continue until the bracts are almost fully expanded.

Temperatures should be no less than 55°F at night, but not more than 70°F. High night temperatures, coupled with low-light intensity, low nutrition, dry soil or improper photoperiod, may delay flowering.

If all this seems like a lot of effort, then it's time to leave poinsettias to the professionals.

JEFFERSON ON MANURE

Thomas Jefferson’s farm and garden at Monticello were legendary, and visits there are a tremendous treat even for today’s horticulture enthusiasts. Our 3rd President only published one horticultural work: “A General Gardening Calendar” appeared in May 1824.

“In 1792 Jefferson, while serving as Secretary of State in Philadelphia, received a letter from his daughter, Martha, complaining about the insect-riddled plants in the Monticello Vegetable Garden. "We will try this winter to cover our garden with a heavy coating of manure. When it is rich it bids defiance to droughts, yields in abundance, and of the best quality. I suspect that the insects which have harassed you have been encouraged by the feebleness of your plants; and that has been produced by the lean state of the soil." Jefferson's rallying cry on the remedial value of manure & the horticultural rewards of soil improvement, has inspired gardeners of all kinds.*

*From Peter Hatch, Director of Gardens & Grounds
Thomas Jefferson Foundation

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**Extension Corner**

*Diane K. DeWitte, Extension Educator*

Each year the All-America Selections of new, tested vegetables, herbs and flowers are announced, and I always like to check which plants have grown successfully in the AAS trial gardens across the country.

As you may recall, the trial garden located in Minnesota is managed by Steve Poppe, senior research scientist, at the UM West Central Research & Outreach Center (ROC) at Morris. In addition, over 200 public display gardens grow AAS plants across the country. Minnesota hosts six display gardens; several are within easy driving distance for us:

- Lyndale Park Gardens – Minneapolis
- Marjorie McNeely Conservatory – St. Paul
- The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum – Chaska
- Morris Horticulture Display Garden – Morris
- UM North Central ROC – Grand Rapids
- UM Les Bolstad Golf Course – Falcon Heights

The All American Selections recently began recognizing “Regional” winners in addition to the annual national winners. Minnesota is located within the ‘Heartland’ region of the AAS map.

The 2016 AAS winners have recently been announced and I’d like to highlight the regional and national winner this month.

**2016 Regional Winner (won Heartland, Southeast and Great Lakes regions)**

*Salvia Summer Jewel Lavender*

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*From Peter Hatch, Director of Gardens & Grounds
Thomas Jefferson Foundation*
This annual flourishes in full sun. It’s part of a Summer Jewel series, but a new lavender color. It grows to medium height, 10-24 inches, in a compact, upright style. It will bloom from late Spring all the way through Autumn. This salvia is tolerant of rain, wind and heat, and attracts bees and hummingbirds.

Here’s what AAS has to say about it: “The fourth AAS Winner in the Summer Jewel™ series of popular AAS Salvia Winners is the newest in color, Summer Jewel™ Lavender. The unique flower color of dusty lavender purple is a delight in the garden and flower containers as well as a major attractor of pollinators including bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. An extra bonus is how much the Goldfinch loves these flower seeds in the fall. It’s a photo-ready moment when these complementary colors of gold and lavender connect! The early blooming, stable, compact uniform growth, and continuous flowering of this plant are additional positives to this plant.”

2016 National AAS Vegetable Winner

**Tomato Candyland Red**

Tomatoes are always popular AAS winners, and this currant tomato is a large, spreading prolific example. It’s a 95-day (from germination) tomato which can be harvested 55 days from transplanting. It grows at least 2 feet tall and spreads 36-48 inches, so it must be staked. It will yield more than 100 tomatoes per plant, and is characterized as tasting “sweet and rich”.

Here is the AAS description of Candyland Red: “Tomato Candyland Red is the only AAS award winning currant-type tomato. Currant tomatoes are smaller in size than cherry-type and are ready to “pop” in your mouth straight from the garden. Gardeners will appreciate the dark red, sweet flavored fruit that can be enjoyed throughout the season. The tomato plant itself has a nice tidier habit than other currant-type plants with the fruit tending to form on the outside of the plant making them easier to harvest.”

If you would like to explore more of the 2016 AAS winners, visit their website at: [http://all-americaselections.org/index.cfm](http://all-americaselections.org/index.cfm).

**MORE INSECTS IN THE HOUSE?!**

UM Extension Entomologist Jeff Hahn recently discussed a native MN insect we might see in the house this winter along with a non-native look-alike which, if misidentified, could cause worry.

The Western conifer seed bug, a native Minnesota insect, ¾” long, reddish-brown and harmless, spends its summers outdoors feeding in the pine trees. However, like some Asian ladybeetles and boxelder bugs, it can get confused when it overwinters, and find its way into your home. It is not anything more than a nuisance because of its presence.

This insect has recently been confused with the kissing bug. Kissing bugs are a type of assassin bug, also ¾” to 1” long, dark brown or black with orange and black markings. It has an elongated head. The kissing bug is a nocturnal blood feeder whose host could include humans. They get their name because of their habit of biting people in the face. They also can vector Chagas disease, a potentially fatal disease.

The good news? Kissing bugs are not in Minnesota. They are tropical/subtropical and found in South & Central America, Mexico and in a few areas of the southern USA.

Western conifer seed beetle (top photo) – Harmless Minnesotan

Kissing bug (bottom) – Blood feeder & disease vector. Not found here.

Kissing bug also resembles masked hunter, a common harmless native assassin bug, distantly related.
MN River Valley Master Gardeners Events

~Mark your calendar for 2016~

Spring Alive! This is the sixth biennial horticulture day hosted by the MN River Valley Extension Master Gardeners.

When: Saturday March 19, 2016
Where: South Central College, North Mankato
Further details of speakers, time and cost will be available soon

Annual Plant Sale
Proven vegetable & landscape plants from local Extension Master Gardeners

When: Saturday May 14, 2016
Where: Mankato Curling Club

SROC Horticulture Day
When: Saturday March 5, 2016, Waseca