Caring for poinsettias during the holiday season

Native to Mexico, poinsettias are a popular holiday plant because of their colorful bracts. While traditionally only available in red, colors have evolved over the years and there are varieties today that will add to your home’s holiday décor.

As with many house plants, poinsettias require a bit of care to ensure they look good throughout the holiday season. These plants should be put near windows that face south, west or east where they will receive bright daylight – preferably about 4 to 6 hours per day. Poinsettias do best in temperatures between 65 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Try to avoid areas near heating vents, cold drafts, fireplaces and space heaters.

The plant should be watered when the soil feels dry to the touch, or the pot feels light when lifted. Avoid letting it get so dry the bracts begin to wilt. Remove the foil covering from the pot and place it in the sink. Water thoroughly and let it drain completely. The roots will rot if left to sit in water.

Your plant should do fine without any fertilizer throughout the holiday season. However, once new growth is observed, use an all-purpose plant fertilizer. Continue to feed the plants every three to four weeks to keep them healthy and provided with needed nutrients for more growth.

After the holidays, the decorations typically go back into storage or another year. Not so with the poinsettia. With proper care, this holiday plant can be transplanted into a larger pot. Use a soil mix with quite a bit of organic matter. Be sure the new pot has good drainage to help avoid root rot.

If you choose to plant it in a part-sun garden in the spring after danger of frost, make sure the soil drains well. Choose a spot that gets four to five hours of sun per day. Gardeners should mix in some organic matter or compost with the garden bed soil to help hold moisture and create a good growing environment for the roots. Be sure to water thoroughly after transplanting.

Some people often wonder what they can do to make their poinsettia bloom. The process can be a bit tricky as it requires excluding the plant from light for a period of time, while also keeping the plant healthy. The reduction in light prevents the plant from producing chlorophyll, which is the pigment that makes plant parts green. This process changes the bracts to red, pink or white, depending on the variety of the poinsettia.