

# POINSETTIAS

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The poinsettia is an essential crop for most growers. It is not, however, the easiest crop to grow, and many growers would like to eliminate the poinsettia from their schedule because of the difficulties encountered. Many of these difficulties can be overcome with some of our modern practices.

## Temperatures

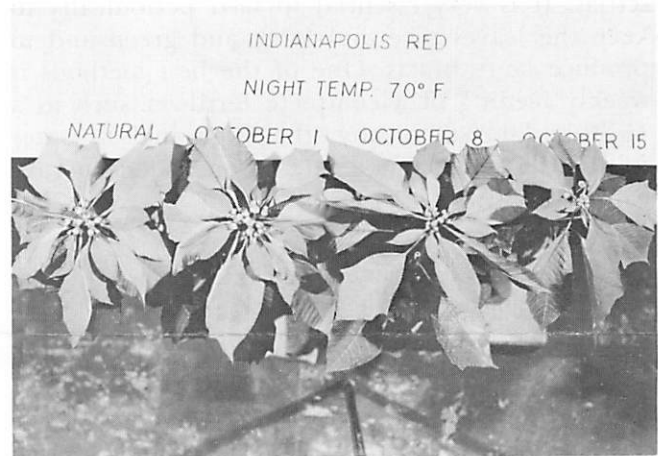
Poinsettias naturally will flower around November 25 to 30 if grown at night temperatures of 65° and above, and since the poinsettia is a tropical plant it requires high temperatures. With night temperatures of 70° the poinsettia will have larger bracts, larger leaves and a better root system. With better root development less trouble will be experienced with black root rot (see article by Dr. Haasis).

When night temperatures are kept between 65° and 70° to obtain better color, larger bracts, and larger leaves, poinsettias should be lighted to delay the flowering. It is too late to start lighting now (floral initiation started about September 22 and lighting now will distort the bracts unless lighting was started prior to September 22) and if you have been lighting, lights should be removed by October 12 if temperatures are held at 65 to 70°, October 7 if temperatures are held at 60°. In case lights were not started on poinsettias they will flower early and temperatures should be kept at 60° to delay early flowering.

## Stretching

If poinsettias are crowded and overwatered they will stretch considerably and also drop the lower foliage. So give your poinsettias as much space as is commercially possible and be careful not to over water. Never allow the roots to grow through the pot, as they will be apt to contact black root rot organisms, and also when the plants are moved they will have a tendency to wilt. Roots may be confined to the pots by treating the staging material with a copper sulfate solution of one ounce to two gallons of water or spraying the staging material with copper naphthanate.

In case the poinsettias do stretch, folding or breaking back is a common practice. There is an art to folding without breaking the stems and when doing this it should be done just when the



Indianapolis Red. Left to right: Natural, October 1, October 8 and October 15 are dates lights were terminated. Picture taken December 15 showing the natural plant well past maturity, and October 8 at its prime. Temperature was 70°.

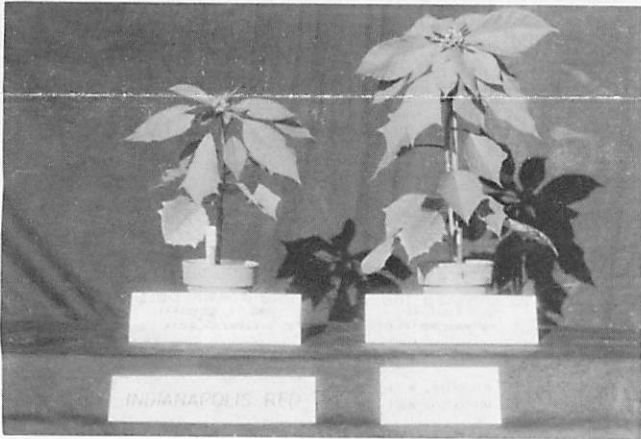


Plant on left received night temperature of 60°. Plant on right received 70° and shows a much larger bract development.

poinsettias are showing color and the stems are still fairly soft. The person doing the folding should make up a paste of fermate and keep dipping his fingers in this paste. This helps to prevent any infection. The poinsettia stem is rolled between the fingers to crush the stem and is folded over and then back up and help together by "Twist-ems" or by tying the stems together. This is a dangerous practice; however, there is no proof or indication that it is detrimental. Folded poinsettias last just as long as ones that have not been folded; but folding is an expensive and tedious operation. To overcome this it is best to propagate late and space the poinsettias properly to prevent overcrowding.

### Feeding

Many growers blame the loss of lower foliage to drafts and the stretching of poinsettias to over-fertilization. Actually, much of the lower leaf drop is due to underfertilization, and experimental evidence has shown that ample fertilization will not increase the height to any great degree on poinsettias. It is very essential to feed periodically to keep the leaves nice and large and green and to produce large bracts. One of the best methods is weekly feeding of a complete fertilizer such as a 15-30-15, 20-20-20 or any other high analysis water soluble fertilizer at the rate of one ounce per 10 gallons of water.



Plant at left was not fertilized until 30 days after planting. Plant on right was fertilized immediately after planting and continued with weekly fertilization. The low nitrogen and low potash were of low rate of a soluble fertilizer as mentioned in the rate of one ounce per 10 gallons of water.

### HYDRANGEAS

October is the month to start storing Hydrangeas. Here in the south, we should use artificial storage. They should be stored in a dark refrigerated storage at 40°F. It is essential to keep the storage dark to insure maturity and proper leaf drop. If leaves are allowed to remain on the plants they will fail to mature properly and will not force during the forcing season. This was demonstrated by the Department of Agriculture at Beltsville, Maryland. It is always a good idea to remove the leaves by hand picking after they have dropped to prevent diseases from spreading. If the hydrangeas fail to drop properly, artificial defoliants can be used. Cyanamid can be used at the rate of 1 pound per 50 gallons of water, or a bushel of rotten apples placed in storage will also encourage leaf drop.

### AZALEAS

Azaleas for Christmas sales should be placed in storage by the first of October. Storage should be for one month at 34° and no lights are needed at this temperature. If azaleas are stored at temperatures above 34° lights should be used. Temperatures as high as 45° may be used, but then lights are required to avoid leaf drop. Coral belles, Snow and Hino are the most popular for Christmas forcing. After storage for 30 days, they can be forced at 60° and they will flower for Christmas.

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