

Retailing Poinsettias



William H. Carlson
Michigan State Univ.
E. Lansing, Mi.

There is a tremendous opportunity to cash in on the sales of this beautiful seasonal potted plant. In 1980, 23.2 million pots of poinsettias were sold to consumers in the United States with a wholesale value of \$66.1 million. The average wholesale price in 1980 was \$2.85 per pot.

Poinsettias are grown as "pinched" multi-flower plants. That is, one plant in a 5" or 6" pot with 3, 4, 5 or more breaks with a flower on each. There are some producers who plant two plants each pinched in 6½" or 7" pots. The resulting plant can have 15 to 20 flowers per plant.

The second type of poinsettia is the single stem or "straight up." These are not pinched and have only one flower per stem, but the flower size is usually about twice the size of a pinched plant.

Red poinsettias represent almost 80 to 85% of the market, while the pink, white and bi-colors (red and white and pink and white) represent the remaining 15%.

The first important factor in the successful retailing of poinsettias is to find a good supplier. There are over 2,000 greenhouse operations that produce poinsettias, so there should be plenty of opportunity to find the right product. It is important that, as a retailer, you know your supplier. Discuss your program with him so that you can work out the details for the most profitable retailing effort. What pot size? What type of plant? What color? What quantity? When should it be delivered? What type

of sleeve should it have? Should it be pre-priced? Will care instructions be included with each plant? All of these questions must be answered, and the answers may be different in various parts of the country.

The cheapest poinsettias are not necessarily the best. A retailer needs to have quality and service as well as an attractive price. I've seen too many retailers sacrifice both service and quality to save 2 or 3 cents.

A quality poinsettia is one that has dark green foliage, a bract that has intense color with the center of the bract (the cyathia) just starting to open and showing a little yellow color. As the poinsettia gets older, more cyathia open and these fall off, leaving an open center. The bracts (colored leaves) will remain on for months.

When you receive your crop, check to make certain there are no white flies on them, and also that the foliage is dark green with good flower color and that the plants are not dried out. If the plant dries out, the leaves will turn yellow and fall off.

The second factor is to display the product properly. This is the key to selling poinsettias. A poor display results in a large shrink factor, and damaged plants have to be marked down.

Here are some points to consider in displaying poinsettias:

1. **Provide adequate space:** Do not cram the plants together. They are not canned goods, but a highly perishable living product.
2. **Place in high traffic areas:** They should be sold quickly. The longer you keep them, the poorer the quality becomes and the poorer the chances are for a sale. They should be sold within 72 hours of the time they arrive at your store.
3. **Keep away from drafts:** If poinsettias are exposed to cold drafts, they will drop their leaves. Therefore, keep them away from the main entrance, where drafts may occur.
4. **Keep at proper temperatures:** The cooler the temperature, the longer they last, as long as the temperatures are not below 50°F. Avoid high temperatures. If temperatures are above 75°F, shelf life will be shortened.
5. **Have proper set up:** Plants must be placed

on trays or on a table where they can be watered. You probably will have to water plants at least once, so display them on the proper equipment to make the job easier.

6. **Big displays attract attention:** You can't sell from an empty wagon. One or two plants won't attract attention. A large display can also be used as a focal point or can even be part of your season's decoration.

7. **Tier the display:** Build it up like a pyramid or a poinsettia living tree. Take the time to build a grand display. It will pay off.

The third area for successful sales is the proper packaging of the plant by the cashier so that the consumer will take a plant home and have it survive. Remember, we stated that drafts or cold temperatures will cause leaf drop. If outside temperatures are below 40°F, plants must be wrapped. If temperatures are below 32°F, they should be wrapped with their sleeve plus an additional wrapping of paper or the plant placed inside a bag. Those stores that allow the customer to carry an unwrapped poinsettia out into freezing temperatures will be issuing a refund to that same customer within two days in 9 out of 10 cases. Remember, a little protection will insure a happy customer. Make certain all cashiers understand this point!

The fourth area for successful sales is to provide the customer with point of sale care information, even if it is only a tag that lists the basic requirements for growing and maintaining the plant. You want to make the customers successful with their plants so they will come back to you again to purchase another.

Poinsettias offer the retailer a colorful seasonal product that can add beauty to your store and profits to your corporation. Do it right and have a Merry Christmas!

Reprinted courtesy Floral Decor Newsletter

