

Poinsettias – Keep ‘em blooming

By Paul Ecke Ranch

The poinsettias you bought in December provided bright color through the holidays, but now that we are well into the New Year, you may be pondering what to do with these festive beauties that are still lush and blooming.

It's possible, but not easy, to keep your poinsettia blooming by following these suggested tips.

- . Cut the plant back to four or six buds by early April or when the bracts begin to fall, whichever occurs first.
- . Place the pot near a sunny window and water and fertilize regularly. New growth should sprout by the end of May. Do continue watering and fertilizing.
- . Beginning on Oct. 1, keep the plants in total darkness for 18 hours a day and bright sunlight the other six. To achieve the needed darkness, place a cardboard box over the plant each day. After eight to 10 weeks of the light and dark routine, plants should develop a new display of holiday blooms.

One thing to remember, these poinsettias have been hybridized to perform best in greenhouse and indoor situations, so they generally do not thrive when transplanted to the garden.

Once the holidays are in sight and your poinsettias are ready for display, place them in the indirect sunlight for at least six hours a day. Keep the room temperature between 68 and 70 degrees and don't expose plants to temperatures below 50 degrees or chilly winds.

Water the plants thoroughly when soil feels dry to the touch, but be careful not to let them sit in standing water. Don't fertilize poinsettias in bloom but nourish them with an all-purpose fertilizer after the blooming season.