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PLANT OF THE MONTH: POINSETTIA

Aside from the Christmas tree, no other plant represents Christmas in this country like poinsettias do. Throughout the United States, poinsettias add wintertime color and warmth.

Not only are poinsettias the most popular Christmas plant, but they are also the best selling flowering potted plant in the country – even though their selling period is limited to six weeks around the holidays.

By selecting healthy plants and with proper care, poinsettia plants will last a long time and provide color, warmth and beauty to a home.

The Paul Ecke Poinsettia Ranch in Encinitas grows the majority of the poinsettia plants sold in this country. In recent years, the Ecke Ranch has developed

some spectacular new varieties that add a new dimension to poinsettia beauty.

Here are some tips that I learned about selecting and caring for poinsettia plants from the experts at the Paul Ecke Ranch:

- Select plants with green foliage all the way down to the soil line. This is a good indication that the plants have active, healthy roots.
- Look for plants that have small green buttons (cyathia) in the center of the colored bracts. These buttons will eventually develop into little yellow flowers.
- When transporting the plants home, make sure they are protected from temperatures below 50 degrees. Chilling causes the leaves to drop.
- Place in a room where there is suf-

ficient natural light to read fine print. You should be able to observe a strong shadow with your hand.

- Water plants thoroughly when you get them home. The entire soil area should be saturated so water seeps throughout the drain hole. Remember to discard excess water. Never allow poinsettias to sit in water. Check the plants daily and water only when the soil feels dry to the touch.
- Fertilize plants within several days. They are without nutrients during the entire marketing process and will need a feeding by then. Use liquid, pills, sticks or dry fertilizer according to the directions on the label.
- If you keep curtains drawn during the day to conserve heat, remember that poinsettias must have at least six hours



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of bright indirect light daily to thrive.

- Keep plants away from drafts, radiators and hot air registers. To prolong the bright color of bracts, the temperature should not exceed 72 degrees in the day or 60 degrees at night.