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### **A Perennial Poinsettia**

Although we normally associate poinsettias with the holiday season, these perennial flowers can be grown throughout the entire year if kept inside. It is native to Mexico where it grows as a shrub and can reach heights of 10 feet or more. While your poinsettia won't reach that size in your home, it can still thrive year after year.

When you bring a poinsettia home from the store, you will want to remove the decorative foil around it. You may need to repot it, especially if the soil feels soggy and has poor drainage - poinsettias are susceptible to stem and root diseases if left in waterlogged soil. When repotting, gently wash the old soil from the roots and choose a potting medium with good drainage. Add water to the poinsettia only once the soil feels dry – generally once a week. Water it thoroughly and allow excess water to drain from the pot.

Poinsettias will do best with bright, indirect light. They should ideally get six hours of light each day. If you place your poinsettia near a window, do not let the leaves touch the glass and be sure there is not a draft from the window. Poinsettias like consistency and will struggle when exposed to hot or cold drafts, so keep it away from space heaters and vents as well. Aim for the temperature to be between 65- and 75-degrees F.

After the holiday season, continue to allow the poinsettia to grow in bright indirect light, watering as needed and fertilizing occasionally. In February, prune back some of the branches to 5 inches tall if the plant is becoming leggy. This will help create a more compact and denser poinsettia for the next bloom. Then in March, prune off any dead leaves and stems. In May you can prune 2 or 3 inches on the sides to encourage more lateral branching. Around Father's Day you can move the plant outside or even plant it in your garden. Remember to bring it back inside around Labor Day or when temperatures start getting below 60-degrees F.

Once September hits, you can start preparing for the next bloom season. Give the poinsettia 8 hours of light and 16 hours of complete darkness each day with a nighttime temperature of 60-degrees F. Water more sparingly during this time. Around Thanksgiving you can bring the poinsettia out of its strict darkness routine, and place in a bright area. Your new blooms should arrive shortly after.

Alternatively, you can treat the poinsettia like any other house plant, and let nature take its course when it comes to bloom time. The choice is yours!