

Seasonal Plant Care

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

It's the weekend after Thanksgiving. Christmas trees have been in sight for ten days, poinsettias are making their appearance and before long everyone will be in the holiday decorating mood. So it's time to talk about taking care of all these plants we have in our homes over the holidays. Several years ago I did NOT write about Christmas tree care and boy did I hear about it! I learned my lesson so here we go.

For many of us it just isn't the same if we don't have a real Christmas tree. The perfect scenario is you go to a Christmas Tree farm, cut a tree down, take it home and have it in your stand full of water an hour or two later. If you are buying a tree at a lot, get one that's as fresh as possible. Give the tree a couple of good hard thumps on the ground. If a bunch of needles fall off, put it back and move on. If they don't fall off, grab one or two needles and bend them between your fingers. If they bend easily without breaking, it's a fresh tree.

Once you get the tree home you want to get it in the stand as soon as possible. Just before you bring the tree inside, cut off about the bottom half inch of the trunk. When a tree is cut the sap quickly dries over this fresh cut and seals off the vessels that move water through the tree. By making a fresh cut and then getting the tree in the water you remove these "plugs" and the tree is more likely to start taking up water. Check the water several times a day for the first week. It should stabilize after the first few days and then you will probably only need to check it twice a day. But be sure to always keep the stand filled with water!

Poinsettias are always a great holiday plant to bring some color into your house. There are many new varieties of poinsettias in varying sizes, blossom types and blossom colors. But be aware that poinsettias are sensitive plants. When you bring it home, make sure it's protected against temperatures below 50 degrees. When you get it home place it in a sunny spot but away from cold drafts, like near a door, or hot air, such as close to a furnace duct.

Watering a poinsettia is very important. If it wilts, even slightly just one time, it'll start to lose leaves. So check the surface of the soil once or twice a day and water when dry to the touch. Poinsettias are also very sensitive to wet soils and can quickly develop root rot if over watered. Since most poinsettias come in pots wrapped with festive colorful foil, be sure to poke some holes through the foil at the bottom of the pot and keep it on a saucer which allows excess water to drain out. If you want to try to keep the poinsettia around all year and get it to re-bloom next year, pick up a copy our poinsettia care bulletin.

Finally, holiday greenery. Any greenery cut from the roots starts to die and dry out immediately. With a tree we keep it in water to slow this process. But for wreaths, swags or other decorative greenery, we don't have that luxury. As these items dry out they become very flammable. Minimize the amount of time you have them in the house and keep them away from heat or flames. A wreath on the outside of your door isn't quite as concerning, but still something to take down soon after the holidays are over.

All of these holiday plants and greenery tend to add greatly to our enjoyment of the holiday season. Let's all take the time and caution to utilize them properly so we can maximize our enjoyment without causing a potential risk to life and home!