

Poinsettias have become an iconic symbol of Christmas. The association of poinsettias and Christmas dates back to a tale of a Mexican peasant girl from the 16th century. During that time, it was a tradition to decorate mangers at churches with flowers and this peasant girl was sad because she was too poor to bring any flowers to the manger in the front of her church. An angel came to her and told her to pick weeds from the roadside and place them in the front of the church. When she placed the weeds near the manger, they sprouted blossoms and became the beautiful poinsettias we know today. Eventually, poinsettias were brought from Mexico to the United States where the tradition of giving poinsettias around Christmas was carried on. If you receive a poinsettia this Christmas, here are some care tips to ensure your plant flourishes throughout the season:

- If you plan to bring a poinsettia out to a car, be sure it is covered. Poinsettias can suffer from cold damage even if they are only exposed for a couple of minutes.
- Don't over water, especially if the pot has decorative foil around the pot. The foil causes standing water to accumulate at the roots. This will cause the poinsettia to suffer from root rot and eventually will wilt. To prevent root rot, poke holes in the bottom of the wrapping to allow the water to drain or pour the excess water out of the foil.
- Be sure your poinsettia sits in an area that is consistently above 60 degrees. Avoid placing them near drafty windows or doorways as poinsettias are very susceptible to cold.
- Avoid setting poinsettias on a heat source such as a radiator, heating vent, or TV. This will cause the leaves to dry out.
- Provide good sunlight. Poinsettias thrive in full sun and will keep their bright color and leaves longer if it has a good source of light.
- Final tip about poinsettias – they are not poisonous. This was a myth that started after a young Hawaiian girl mysteriously died. The parents recalled she had nibbled on a poinsettia earlier in the day and the myth has grown ever since.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the Extension office at 701-524-2253 or alicia.harstad@ndsu.edu. NDSU is an equal opportunity institution.