

NEWS RELEASE
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OLD AND NEW

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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This past weekend, requests for columns on three topics were received: Pine problems, “Rain Beetles,” and how to make last years poinsettias turn red. We have written about Grey Pine problems (May, 2002) and Rain Beetles (November, 2001) before. If you would like a copy of those articles, call the UCCE office, 966-2417 or visit our website:

www.cemariposa.ucdavis.edu.

Now, how to make poinsettia plants turn red? The basic requirement is 12 hours of total darkness each day for about six weeks. A closet, black plastic bag, or similar light-excluding system should work. Remember that only a few minutes of even faint light is enough to break the 12-hour rule, so don't open the closet door until morning each day. During the day, six to eight hours of sunlight should keep the plants healthy. During this treatment period, continue to water and fertilize normally. The color will start to show in the top leaves first and continue down the plant. Once the bracts are colored, light will not cause them to turn green again. When temperatures stay above freezing in the spring, poinsettias can be grown outdoors.

Poinsettia plants are the most popular indoor potted plant in America. More than 62 million are sold each year, most grown in California nurseries. Despite the popularity, the myth continues that poinsettia plants are poisonous. According to the American Medical Association, these plants are classified as non-toxic. Based on research, one source indicated that a 50-pound child would have to ingest over a pound of poinsettia leaves and stems to even exceed

experimental doses that were considered non-toxic. These plants are, however, non-edible, especially the white milky sap. Some people are especially sensitive to this latex material and may have adverse reactions. Since active children are apt to put anything into their mouths, it is always a good idea to keep non-edible materials, including poinsettias, out of their reach.

For a more complete list of especially poisonous plants and some that can cause other problems, contact the UCCE office in Mariposa, 966-2417, for a free list.

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