



Bob and Lillian Hendrix's decorations at their home at 206 W. Fifth Ave.



Christmas trimmings hang over Raeford Post Office customers.

Poinsettias Blooming In NC State Greenhouses

If it weren't for the efforts of researchers like Dr. Roy Larson of the North Carolina State University Department of Horticultural Science, your Christmas poinsettia might be a spindly, 10-foot shrub with a single, sparse flower cluster. Like most poinsettias grown before 1970, it would probably die a few days after blooming.

Could this be the plant that spawned a multi-million-dollar commercial industry—the same plant that inspired North Carolina growers to produce almost three million poinsettias this year, ranking N.C. in the top 10 states for poinsettia production?

Actually, this lackluster shrub resembles the natural poinsettia growing wild in its native country, Mexico.

If "poinsettia" sounds more French than Mexican, the credit goes to the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Poinsett, who sent the curious red and green plant to his greenhouses in Greenville, S.C., in 1825.

By 1899, the poinsettia had gained a reputation as "the Christmas flower," competing with the holly sprig—an early Christian Christmas decoration symbolizing the Virgin Mary.

The first commercially produced poinsettias, however, were a far cry from the bushy 18-inch "Glory" poinsettias gracing the NCSU greenhouses today.

In search of the perfect poinsettia, Larson and his associates have spent 27 years experimenting with fertilization techniques, planting and watering timetables and chemical treatment. By treating the plants with growth retardant, they have produced shorter stems, more brilliant colors and longer life spans.

The persnickety poinsettia, which normally blooms only after a series of long, cool autumn nights, unperturbed by light or heat, can now be made to bloom in any season and can be kept in bloom for as long as a year.

Experiments to discover the proper times to "pinch" new growth have enabled the NCSU floriculturists to increase the number of flower clusters from one to as many as eight "inflorescences" per plant.

Based on his research, Larson makes the following recommenda-

tions for preserving poinsettias: avoid drafts, heating vents and dry heat emitted by television sets; place in sunny locations; water when the soil feels dry; and keep in a cool moist place at night.

Every spring and fall, Larson, editor for the "N.C. Flower Growers Bulletin," and his NCSU colleagues give short courses on poinsettias, azaleas and other flowers, sharing their findings with commercial growers. In addition to their expertise, they offer surprising tidbits about poinsettias.

The red poinsettia "flower," for example, is not a flower at all, but a cluster of modified leaves known as bracts. A red pigment blocks out the green chlorophyll in the bracts, giving the appearance of blooming flowers. The true flowers are the tiny yellow ovoids at the tip of the stem, Larson said.

If the average of 26 bracts per cluster holds true, you will end on an unhappy note when playing "Santa love me...Santa loves me not." If your "Christmas flower" has fewer than 10 bracts, it is deficient by today's standards.

To impress friends with your knowledge of floriculture, point out the drop of honey-sweet nectar secreted by the small yellow gland attached to the ovoids. You may fool them into believing the nectar is an aphrodisiac, but claiming the poinsettia is poison would only bolster a common myth.

"White rates have been forced poinsettias without developing so much as an upset stomach," Larson said. Still, he emphasizes that poinsettias are meant to be admired, not eaten.

Creating poinsettias to specification is one of the specialties at the NCSU greenhouses. As the poinsettia's popularity spreads to Europe and Japan, the demand for "Glory" (a German variety), "Annette Hegg" (a long-lasting Norwegian plant) and other hybrids is increasing.

"We are trying to grow more beautiful poinsettias more efficiently to lower the expense for the consumer," Larson said.

Joel Poinsett would be pleased to see the spindly poinsettia import flourish in the Raeford greenhouse and the commercial market.

May the radiance of love and friendship brighten each day of the Yuletide Season. Thank you for your continued support throughout the year.

Edenborough Pharmacy
Edenborough Center

O HOLY NIGHT

May your Christmas be blessed with peace and happiness!

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Main St. Raeford
Jane Andrews, owner

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May songs of happiness fill your Holiday Season. Tidings of joy to all. Thank you for your patronage.

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Getting down to brass tacks, we want to wish you every joy of this bright season. Our business is built on your patronage and we thank you for it!

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Raeford Kindergarten & Day School
Eleonor Scull, Eros Tillett,
Frances Hawkins, Connie Ferguson

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