Watering Poinsettias

Distribute 12-10 for use 12-19

Many households and businesses have beautiful poinsettias on display to celebrate the Holidays. The question is, how often should they be watered and what is the best watering technique to use to maintain their appearance over a long period? If you can keep moisture levels moist but not soggy, you can expect the plant to stay attractive for 4-6 months.

A simple answer is to water the plant lightly every two days and provide a half hour soaking before the soil becomes dry enough to cause the plant to wilt. For this technique to work, it becomes important to recognize the symptoms of drying in terms of the container’s weight, the feel of the soil, and/or by the color of the soil.

Weight- the potting mix of a poinsettia is very light when it is dry. If you have hefted it when the soil is moist, you will recognize the weight change as it dries.

Touch- a moist potting soil feels moist to the touch. This is usually the easiest way to detect dry soil.

Color- poinsettia potting mix changes from black to light brown as it dries. It is a problem if the soil reaches the brown stage. It needs to be soak before that point.

Watering poinsettias every other day is the recommended practice. The problem arises because the poinsettia container is often displayed on furniture that could be damaged by water stains if the recommended practice of adding water until it emerges from the drain hole is practiced.

One tried and effective watering option that spares the furniture is to provide the light watering every other day with ice cubes and then soak the container every week to address any moisture deficit that occurs before it affects the plant. The limited water added with the ice and the help of the foil cover on the container, prevents water from reaching the furniture.

The question of how many ice cubes to use is an interesting issue. Dr. Jerry Parsons has a detailed analysis of ice cube needs based on container size on plantanswers.com. His recommendation of 4, 8, and 12 regular size ice cubes for 6, 8, and 12 inch containers respectively, works well.

For the weekly soaking, remove the decorative foil and sit the container in the half filled sink for one half hour to allow the soil to soak up water through its drain hole.

Like with most plants a long period of soggy soil can cause root rot in poinsettia, but as long as the container is allowed to drain after the soaking, and there is no water in the saucer under the plant, soggy soil should not be a problem.

Happy Holidays!