



witch watch

Gundella

Poinsettias' steamy history

I once spent Christmas in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It was 96 degrees when I arrived, and I wondered how it could ever seem like Christmas to a Michigan in a place such as that.

But as soon as we started down the streets, there was no mistaking the season. Poinsettias were everywhere — not the little pot plants that we have here, but huge bushes, every bit as large as the lilac bushes in my yard at home.

Some actually reached the second story windows of the houses there. Every bush was loaded with the bright red, pink, white and variegated bursts of color that surrounded the tiny golden blossoms in the center.

"The Poinsettia Manual," by Paul Ecke, tells us that, although the poinsettia is now the symbol of Christmas throughout much of our modern world, it was first grown in Mexico by the Aztec Indians long before Christianity came to the western hemisphere.

Dr. Joel Poinsett, a rich South Carolinian, first brought the flower to this country in the 1820s. Later it was named "Poinsettia" in his honor.

LAT YEAR, more than 25 million poinsettias were sold in the United States. Many legends have grown up about this beautiful flower.

One that is very popular in the islands tells of a poor little girl who wanted to place a gift on the altar for Jesus at Christmas Eve,

but because of her economic situation, she had nothing to give.

An angel heard her crying and told her to gather twigs from the leafless bushes nearby and take them to the church.

The child obeyed, and when she reached the church, she was amazed to find that the twigs were now in full bloom, and she carried an armload of beautiful poinsettias to give as her gift to the Christ child.

Although this flower blooms at Christmas, it is not uncommon for the blossoming to continue for up to six months.

WITH PROPER care, your Christmas plant may keep from year to year. Place it where the temperature is between 60-75 degrees F. at all times. Water it thoroughly, and throw excess water away.

If you want your plant to blossom again next year, it is important that it have 12 hours of darkness out of every 24 hours. Even turning a light on in the room can disturb its natural balance, and interfere with its blossoming.

The best way to avoid this is to obtain a large cardboard box. It should be considerably larger than the plant itself, so that none of the leaves will be touched by the sides of the box.

Seal all cracks in the box with masking tape. Turn this box upside down over the plant early each evening, and remove it each morning. You must do this faithfully for about 60 days before it will bloom again.

Tax returns necessary for indulgent Santas

Thinking of giving gifts this holiday season, either of cash or tangible assets? There may be a requirement to file gift tax returns, according to the Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants, if the gift exceeds the level allowed.

A holiday present of up to \$3,000 a year to each of your nieces and nephews can be made without paying a federal gift tax.

If you and your spouse made the gifts together, this will increase your tax-free gift to \$6,000 for each person. Depending on your prior gifts, it may be possible to give more to each person without incurring a gift tax. When in doubt, the CPAs say, check with a tax advisor for more details.

A special provision of the tax law

governs gifts between spouses. Basically, a substantial amount of cash property can be transferred to a husband or a wife while still avoiding the payment of estate or gift taxes.

Gift giving can be advantageous to businesses also, say the Michigan CPAs, if companies are careful in their usage.

When giving clients or customers an inexpensive novelty or specialty item, worth under \$4 and with the company name imprinted on it, it may be taken as a business gift and will not enter into the annual \$25 per donee gift limit.

Holiday greeting cards with the company imprint are also a tax-deductible business expense, say the CPAs, as is a gift of packaged food or drink but only if it is to be consumed later.

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