

UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Poinsettias

Marketing

Potential retail markets include farmers markets and direct sales from the greenhouse or farm. Wholesale markets include local garden centers, florists, groceries, discount department stores, farm stores, and roadside stands.

Other potential markets include interior designers and organizations that sell poinsettias as fundraisers (such as schools and clubs).

Market Outlook

This popular Christmas plant is the best selling potted flowering plant in the U.S. Poinsettias are sold over a six-week period beginning in early November. Greenhouse operators have become quite efficient in growing poinsettias, so while the market is relatively large, profits remain small due to over-production.

Production Considerations

Site selection and planting

A heated greenhouse structure is necessary for producing poinsettias. Tobacco greenhouses can be used; however, poinsettia production during the late summer and fall might compete for labor with tobacco harvest, housing and stripping.

Poinsettias are propagated vegetatively from cuttings taken from stock plants. A key decision facing new growers is whether to produce their own stock plants



for cuttings or to purchase cuttings, either unrooted or rooted. Intermittent mist is essential for rooting cuttings. Rooted cuttings are transplanted directly to the final container for “finishing.”

There is no single best growing media for producing quality poinsettias; however, a very well-drained substrate that is on the coarse side is important.

Poinsettias are sensitive to day length. Flowers are initiated in mid-to-late September, depending on the variety, and require less than 12 hours of daylight continuously to initiate bloom production. Lighting from artificial sources, such as street lights, can delay flowering. Where external light sources are a problem, black-out curtains should be used.

Typically, plants are pinched in late August or early September in order to stimulate the production of lateral shoots. It is critical that pinches be made on time according to schedule. Growth retardants can be used for height control. Growers who produce multiple varieties will have the market advantage. However, different varieties can also have different scheduling needs, and production practices will have to be modified accordingly.

Pest management

Greenhouse conditions that favor plant growth also favor the rapid build-up and spread of insects and diseases. Prevention and careful monitoring are the keys to insect



and disease management. Controlling weeds under benches and around the greenhouse will also help reduce insect pests and disease problems.

Potential disease problems include *Rhizoctonia* root and stem rot, *Pythium* root rot, *Thielaviopsis* black root rot, *Botrytis* blight and bacterial soft rot. Regular preventative fungicide drenches in combination with good sanitation and cultural practices are essential to controlling poinsettia diseases. Common insect pests include white flies, thrips, fungus gnats, shoreflies and spider mites. Using yellow sticky cards to monitor insect populations can help growers determine when and how often insecticides should be applied.

Post-production

Poinsettias are finished and ready to be shipped when the primary bracts are fully colored and pollen is visible. Plants should be removed from the greenhouse environment within one to two weeks of reaching maturity. Sleeving helps protect plants during transport; however, sleeves should not be left on more than 24 hours from greenhouse to market.

Economic Considerations

Poinsettia production is a high-risk business with significant start-up costs as well as demanding labor and management. Some growers choose to produce poinsettias in a rotation with bedding plants. This enables them to keep their greenhouse in full production year round and to receive some profits during the fall.

Initial investments include greenhouse construction, production system costs, and equipment. The cost of a production-ready greenhouse, excluding land costs, can run approximately \$10 per square foot. Production costs and returns vary greatly depending on crops grown, greenhouse size, production system, and marketing strategy. Typically, the profit margin

for growing poinsettias is very low. Rutgers University has established a summary cost of production budget for poinsettias grown in 6-inch pots.

More Information

- The Greenhouse Business in Kentucky – A Review of Crops and How to Begin a Business (University of Kentucky, 2002)
<http://www.uky.edu/Ag/HLA/anderson/greenhousesinkentucky.pdf>
- Preventing Greenhouse Poinsettia Diseases (University of Kentucky, 2004)
http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/plantpathology/ext_files/PPFShtml/PPFS-OR-H-2.pdf
- Selected Resources and References for Commercial Greenhouse Operators (University of Kentucky, 2002)
<http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Horticulture/anderson/greenhousereferences.pdf>
- Commercial Floriculture Information Center (North Carolina State University)
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/floriculture/>
- Floriculture (Purdue University)
<https://sharepoint.agriculture.purdue.edu/agriculture/flowers/default.aspx>
- Greenhouse Costs of Production Budgets: Poinsettias (Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension)
<http://aesop.rutgers.edu/~farmmgmt/GreenHouse/Examples/ghpoinsettiasbudget.html>
- Maturity of Finished Poinsettias (Paul Ecke Ranch, 1999)
http://www.ecke.com/html/tibs/tib_maturity.html
- Poinsettia: Commercial Greenhouse Production (Auburn University)
<http://www.ag.auburn.edu/dept/hf/landscape/poinset.htm>
- Texas Poinsettia Producers Guide (Texas A & M)
<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/greenhouse/nursery/guides/poinsettia/index.html>