

## Poinsetta - Symbol of Christmas

The poinsetta is today our most popular Christmas flower. In fact, it has become a symbol of Christmas to many people. But this wasn't always the case.

The plant isn't, as some believe, a native of the holy land—but grows wild in Central America. Throughout the tropics it is used as a large woody shrub in outdoor landscapes. It was introduced into the United States back in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, our first ambassador to Mexico. The name "Poinsetta" is in his honor. Poinsett sent plants home to his own conservatory in South Carolina. And he sent some to his daughter in Philadelphia.

The poinsetta was first

propagated and sold in this country by Robert Buist, one of Philadelphia's early nurserymen. By the late 1800's the plants were being grown by florists for Christmas, but they were still somewhat a rarity at the turn of the century.

Those early poinsettias, says Dunham, were "contrary" plants—and difficult to grow. Any change in the environment, and they dropped their leaves. In fact, florists used to plant ferns with them so that when the leaves fell off the poinsettias, their stems wouldn't look so bare.

The first improvement in the florist's poinsetta was the variety called "Oakleaf," reported to have been developed in New

Jersey in 1923. Development of this exotic plant has continued, and today's poinsettias are a great improvement over those of only a few years ago. They are vigorous growing, produce multiple blooms, hold their leaves, and their flowers last long after Christmas and come in several shades of red, white, pink and even salmon.

The flower of the poinsetta is an example of the great versatility of mother nature. The red "petals" are really leaves or bracts. They are green at first and then turn red as the real flowers develop. The true flowers are inside the knob-like bumps in the center. Each of these bumps—called a cyathium—contains a single

female flower surrounded by a cluster of male flowers. Each cyathium also has a prominent yellow gland that produces nectar. This combination of nectar and the surrounding brilliant red bracts is an irresistible attractant for insect pollinators in nature. But since these insect cooperators are still in the tropics, poinsettias seldom set seed in our homes unless we hand-pollinate them from another flower on the plant.

To get the maximum satisfaction from your Christmas poinsetta, the horticulturist suggests you make sure that it doesn't dry out. But at the same time, don't keep it sitting in water. Also keep the plant out of drafts—especially from hot air vents. And when you aren't using it as a table centerpiece, place it in a sunny window.

## Goddard Pleas For Curbing Inflation

A plea for government action in halting what he terms "runaway inflation" has been sounded by the chief executive of one of the nation's leading agricultural cooperatives.

Ronald N. Goddard, executive vice president and chief executive officer of Agway Inc. addressed his plea to 22 Senators and 117 Representatives from 11 northeastern states, and, along with a covering letter to President Gerald Ford, treasury Secretary William E. Simon, Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz, and Commerce Secretary Frederick Dent.

"We need your leadership to develop and implement federal programs that will be effective not only for our farmer members, but for all citizens of this country," Goddard told the congressmen.

Agway is a farm supply and food marketing cooperative owned by 113,000 farmers in 11 northeastern states including all of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware. Goddard called for non-partisan statesmanship in striving for a balanced budget and "other essential actions" to reduce inflation and prevent a depression. He said Agway has adopted its own program in the fight against inflation, which, he said, is designed to help farmers and its own em-

ployees "meet the onslaught of continued inflation."

As one step in the program Agway has put a ceiling on its earnings for this fiscal year of 1.75 percent of sales.

"It is unrealistic to expect our citizens to respond to anti-inflation programs in the face of inaction by a Congress that has not accepted sound fiscal responsibility and the necessity of long-range growth for our country," Goddard declared.

Goddard asked Senators and Representatives to use their ability and exercise their authority in the interest of all Americans. He said that appropriate action is an "absolute necessity," pointing out that it is the Congress that has the power to reverse the current economic trend.

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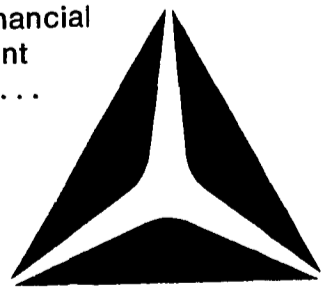
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