

Poinsettia Production Requires Precise Attention

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EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — They are probably somewhere in your home right now. Perhaps sitting on a side table, perched in the living room, or lending their vibrant hue to the window above the kitchen sink.

For years now, the poinsettia has been synonymous with Christmas, a decoration as much a part of holiday finery as holly boughs or evergreen trees.

At Frysville Farm, the Fry family knows firsthand the work that goes into producing the vividly colored plants that customers cart away.

The family began to grow poinsettias in 1972, probably about 5,000 a year in those early years, estimates Anthony Fry, son of founders Morton and Beckie Fry. Fry, along with brothers Vincent and M. Simon, work full-time on the operation, with occasional help from their parents, spouses, and their sister Victoria.

More recently, the business has expanded to include more than

80,000 plants, most from their own stock, he said. Hybrids are brought in from California or Central America to propagate from; however, 95 percent is propagated on the home farm.

The poinsettia is of the Euphorbia family, which means that the vibrant colors of the plant, commonly mistaken for petals, are actually modified leaves.

The "flower" is actually a modified leaf that has changed from green to a color, said Fry. The tiny petalless flower — the cyathia — is generally yellow in poinsettias.

The program starts the first week of April, when the 4,000 stock plants arrive. The small rooted cuttings are transplanted into one-gallon pots and will grow in the greenhouses until after July 4, when they have reached bushel-basket size.

At this time, the top few inches of the plant are cut off, yielding approximately 20 tender green shoots per plant.

These unrooted cuttings, sus-

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Anthony Fry, part of the family-owned operation Frysville Farms, shows some of the plants that are for sale this season.



Culturing and training the tall poinsettia trees begins in February.



These unrooted cuttings, just taken from the stock plant, will spend three weeks in misting beds as they grow roots.



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