



# Organic Newsletter

Winter Edition, 2009

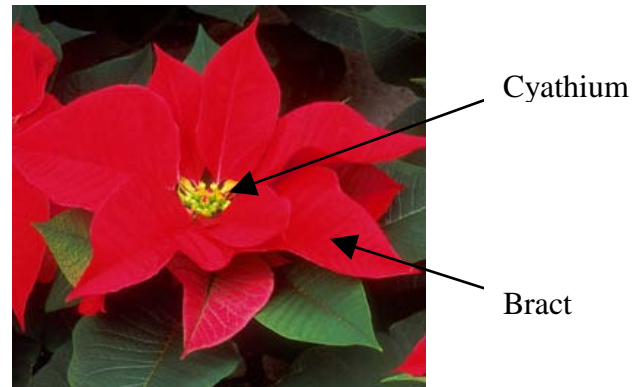
## Poinsettia Pointers

One of the foremost plants of the holiday season is *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, the poinsettia. The poinsettia has been in cultivation as early as the Aztec civilization, where they used the milky sap it exudes for fevers and used the red “flowers” for dye. Surprising to most, the poinsettia is actually a tropical plant native to Mexico where it grows about ten feet in height.

Meaning “very beautiful” it was first given its botanical name by Wilenow, a German botanist in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The common name however, came care of Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first US Ambassador to Mexico and lover of botany. He came upon the poinsettia on a Mexican roadside in 1828 and brought cuttings back to his greenhouse in South Carolina. Aside from a successful political career he is most known for the introduction of the poinsettia to the United States.

A common misconception with this fascinating plant is that it is poisonous. As with many other members of the *Euphorbiaceae*, it exudes a milky sap when plant parts are broken that can cause minor skin irritations. Worries over ingestion of the leaves and bracts by children or pets are unfounded. In a study performed by Ohio State University, a 50 pound child would have to ingest 500 leaves to feel a slight tummy ache.

Another fact not commonly known is that the “flowers” are actually bracts (modified leaves). Similar to the dogwood, the actual flowers are found in the center and are called the cyathium. Once all the pollen of the cyathium has been shed the bracts will soon fall. Conversely, when put in low light, the cyathium will abort and completely drop but the bracts will remain for some time after.



Moreover in order to produce these beautiful bracts they must be subjected a specific period of darkness. To induce on-time flowering they must have absolute darkness from 5pm to 8am beginning October 1<sup>st</sup>. Even the slightest bit of light pollution can prevent their flower production.

This season when purchasing your poinsettia there are a few points to keep in mind. First, all the foliage should be a dark green and bracts should be fully colored. Choose plants that look full and balanced from every side and that have not been crowded close together. Most importantly when taking your poinsettia home if the outdoor temperatures are below 50°F be sure to protect the plant by putting it in a plastic sleeve. Exposure for even a few minutes to cold temperatures will damage the plant.

After the poinsettia is in the warmth of your home remember to keep it away from warm or cold drafts, like radiators or the front door. Also make sure the plant isn't touching cold windows. Place your poinsettia where it will get six hours of indirect sunlight, and water when soil is dry.

Using these selection and care instructions will help you pick a beautiful plant and knowing its history can only make it more charming!

## Fun Fact:



**The burgundy coloration in plants is a result of the anthocyanin pigment, which helps protect the plant from the sun's UV rays!**

This pigment is present in all plants and is stimulated with the presence of light. Anthocyanin is employed by plants to protect tender tissues; such as Japanese andromeda (*Pieris japonica*) whose new growth in the spring has a reddish tinge which later matures to green. For plants such as the crimson pygmy barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Crimson Pygmy') that are completely burgundy, this is a result of the overproduction of anthocyanin at all times! If planted in shade, some of these plants will appear green due to lack of light stimuli.

## Houseplant Help

With the falling of the leaves and changing of the temperatures, we begin to ready our gardens for their wintery sleep. Included in these autumnal chores is moving our houseplants back to their windowsill or bookshelf before temperatures drop below 45°F.



(Mealybugs)

However, before bringing them in, you want to inspect them for any unwanted pests. A few of the pests commonly found on houseplants are mealybugs, spider mites or

scale. Hosing your plants off with water can usually control minor infestations.

The next step involves checking your plant's root ball. While living in a pot their roots can become so numerous that they displace most of the soil. When a plant becomes root bound you may see roots protruding from the drainage holes; they may have little or no new growth or dry out quickly after watering.

If repotting is needed, use a container that is two inches larger than the current one. Fill the new container with your moistened home-made soilless mixture of peat, perlite and vermiculite or buy an organic bagged potting soil. When ready to re-plant you should gently tease the roots apart to avoid the constant circling they are already displaying. You should also ensure that the plant is not buried in its new pot; take care to not pile soil above its soil line.

After these preliminary steps, next is acclimatizing your plants to the indoor environment. The change in light and humidity is very drastic and if not done properly can cause wilting and leaf loss.

To begin, bring in your plants at night and place back outside in the morning. Increase the amount of time it spends indoors over the next two weeks, until it's inside full-time.

Once indoors remember that your plants will not require as much as water as when they were outside. However, heating can dry out foliage and soil so be vigilant with plants that are near radiators. There are also some plants such as succulents and begonias that enter a semi-dormant state and will also not require as much water.

Additionally, during the growing season fertilizing your plants with a slow release fertilizer is beneficial because of the controlled dispersion of nutrients. Other fertilizers you can add are worm castings, seaweed extracts and alfalfa meal.

When the warm weather returns you must again gradually acclimate your plants to the great outdoors. First move them to a shaded area during the day. Gradually expose them to a little sunlight while increasing their time outdoors. After a few weeks they'll be ready for the beautiful weather ahead!

## Fun Fact:



**The tallest snowman was a Guinness Book of Record breaking one hundred and thirteen feet and seven inches!**

Built in Bethel Maine and finished on February 17 1999, he was named Angus, king of the mountain, after their

mayor. Angus was so large he had tires for eyes and trees for arms!



Wishing You a Wonderful Winter!

The Organically Green Team



*"I frequently tramped eight or ten miles through the deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech-tree, or a yellow birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines."*

- Henry David Thoreau

## Organically Grown

### Caramel Apple Pie



### Ingredients

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- Pinch salt
- 3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, cold, cut in chunks
- 2 eggs separated, (yolks for the pastry, whites for the glaze)
- 3 tablespoons ice water, plus more if needed

### Caramel Apples:

- 1 cup sugar, plus 1/4 cup for the top
- 3 tablespoons water
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup red wine
- 1/2 vanilla bean, split and scraped
- 1 lemon, halved
- 8 apples (*recommended: Organic Granny Smith and Organic Gala*)
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 cinnamon stick, freshly grated
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter

## Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

To make the pastry, combine the flour and salt together in a large bowl. Cut in the chunks of cold butter with a pastry blender, a little at a time, until the dough resembles cornmeal. Add the 2 egg yolks and the ice water, and blend for a second just to pull the dough together and moisten. Be careful not to overwork the dough. Form the dough into a ball, wrap it tightly in plastic wrap, and let it rest in the refrigerator for 1 hour.

While the dough is resting, prepare the filling:

To make the caramel sauce: place the sugar and water in a small pot and cook, stirring constantly, over medium-low heat until the sugar has melted and caramelized, about 10 minutes. Remove the pot from the burner and add the cream and wine slowly. It may bubble and spit, so be careful. When the sauce has calmed down, return it to the flame, add the vanilla bean and heat it slowly, until the wine and caramel are smooth and continue to slowly cook until reduced by half. Remove from the heat and cool until thickened.

Fill a large bowl with cold water and squeeze in the lemon juice. Peel the apples with a paring knife, cut them in half, and remove the core with a melon baller. Put the apple halves in the lemon-water (this will keep them from going brown). Toss the apples with the flour and cinnamon.

Take the dough out of the refrigerator, unwrap the plastic, and cut the ball in half. Rewrap and return 1 of the balls to the refrigerator, until ready for the top crust. Let the dough rest on the counter for 15 minutes so it will be pliable enough to roll out. Using a rolling pin, roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface into a 12-inch circle. Carefully roll the dough up onto the pin and lay it inside a 10-inch glass pie pan. Press the dough into the pan so it fits tightly.

Slice a couple of the apples at a time using a mandolin or a very sharp knife. The apples need to be thinly sliced so that as the pie bakes, they collapse on top of each other with no air pockets. This makes a dense, meaty apple pie. Cover the bottom of the pastry with a layer of apples, shingling the slices so there are no gaps. Ladle about 2 ounces of the cooled red wine caramel sauce evenly over the apple slices. Repeat the layers, until the pie is slightly overfilled and domed on the top; the apples will shrink down as the pie cooks. Top the apples with pieces of the butter.

Now, roll out the other ball of dough just as you did the first. Brush the bottom lip of the pie pastry with a little beaten egg white to form a seal. Place the pastry circle on top of the pie, and using some kitchen scissors, trim off the overhanging excess from around the pie. Crimp the edges of dough together with your fingers to make a tight seal. Cut slits in the top of the pie so steam can escape while baking. Place the pie on a sheet tray and tent it with a piece of aluminum foil, so the crust does not cook faster than the apples.

Bake the caramel apple pie for 25 minutes on the middle rack. In a small bowl, combine the remaining 1/4 cup of sugar with the freshly grated cinnamon. Remove the foil from the pie and brush the top with the remaining egg white. Sprinkle evenly with the cinnamon sugar and return to the oven. Continue to bake for another 25 minutes, until the pie is golden and bubbling. Let the apple pie rest at room temperature for at least 1 hour to allow the fruit pectin to gel and set; otherwise the pie will fall apart when you cut into it.

*Note: If your are trying to achieve an organic lifestyle we recommend using certified organic ingredients, when available, in all recipes to maximize flavors and nutrition while minimizing your risk of exposure to pesticides, chemicals and preservatives.*

We offer the following services to help increase the enjoyment and beauty of your property:

Tree / Shrub:

- ❖ Shrub & Tree Spraying / Fertilization Programs
- ❖ Integrated Pest Management
- ❖ Soil Restoration
- ❖ Plant and Soil Stimulation Program
- ❖ Deep Root Feeding
- ❖ Root Growth Enhancement
- ❖ Mature Tree Restoration
- ❖ Air Spading
- ❖ Radial Trenching
- ❖ Vertical Mulching
- ❖ Anti-Desiccant Spraying
- ❖ General Tree and Shrub Maintenance Removal

Turf:

- ❖ Lawn Renovation
- ❖ Fertilization
- ❖ Overseeding
- ❖ Core Aeration
- ❖ Estate / Property Purification

Organic Pest Control:

- ❖ Flying Insect
- ❖ Deer / Geese
- ❖ Rodent Repellent
- ❖ Organic Tick & Flea Control

***New for 2009!***

***We are now offering Outdoor Holiday Décor.***

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