

How to pick a good poinsettia at the store

Picking the best poinsettia comes down to knowing how to judge the plant's maturity and health.

"You want it to last as long as possible, but you also want it to peak at just the right time," said Alan Stevens, horticulturist with Kansas State Extension.

The best way to judge a poinsettia's maturity is to examine its flowers, Stevens said.

That can be tricky unless shoppers know the colorful parts on top of each stem are not flowers. They may look like petals, but they're actually bracts - leaves that change color. Poinsettias are a native of Mexico, and their bracts' color switch happens as the days grow shorter, the night get longer and they prepare to bloom.

"These special leaves' purpose is to attract insects to pollinate the flower, which starts out as a cluster of ball-like structures in the middle of each set of bracts," Stevens said. "When those ball-like buds are still tight, the plant has some maturing to do. So, it might be an appropriate choice to buy."

A few opening buds mean the plant should reach full flower in several weeks, he added. So, it could

be a good choice when shopping in early December.

"By the 25th, the colorful reproductive structures should be exposed, and they'll even have a dusting of yellow pollen. The plant will be at its peak, its most colorful and interesting," Stevens said. "After the flowers fade and drop, the plant will still be attractive. But you'll be more likely to put it with your houseplant than to feature it on the dinner table."

Plant height can have little or nothing to do with plant health, he said. Traditionally breeders try to ensure blooming plant height will be about 2.5 times the width of the pot, so plant and pot look in proportion. They also grow what they think will sell best - which tend to be poinsettias in the 15- to 18-inch range (both wide and tall).

But, healthy shorter poinsettias also are available, Stevens said. And, one of the newer types on sale now is much, much larger. It's a dramatic tree form, encouraged by hand to develop a single 1- to 5-feet tall "trunk" with a large, round poinsettia head.

Whatever their height, quality poinsettias are dense - lush look-

ing, he said. For example, one in a 6-inch pot should have a least five sets of bracts.

Healthy poinsettias have sturdy stems. They show no signs of disease, damage or insect infestation (typically, tiny white flies or aphids). They're neither drooping nor wilting. And, they have dark green foliage down to the soil line - no yellow intruders and few to no lost leaves.

How they're displayed can be a clue to the kind of care poinsettias are getting, Stevens said. And that can be another sign of whether they'll last very long.

Nurseries typically ship the plants in a plastic or paper wrap, to prevent damage. If temperatures are below 50 degrees, poinsettias will also need the protection of a wrap for the trip from store to warmed car to warmer home. Even a few minutes in frigid temperatures can damage the plants' leaves.

While poinsettias are on the shelf, however, they should be wrap-free, the horticulturist said. Wrapping may be a basic for protecting poinsettias, but it also makes the plants deteriorate more quickly. So, the less wrapped time, the better.

Displayed poinsettias need to

have enough room, as well. Cramping poinsettias together is like asking for bent and broken plant parts, he said.

"I always tip the plant out of the pot and check its root ball, too. White roots are healthy. Brown roots aren't," Stevens said. "At the same time, I check the moisture level of the soil. It should be moist, but no wet. And, a poinsettia sitting in dry soil will deteriorate quickly."

All of those checks are fairly easy to do - which is a good thing, he said. Plant breeders are coming up with so many new "looks" that choosing which variety to buy can be difficult.

Red bracts remain buyer's favorite. But, pink, white and maroon also have fans. Plus, the newer varieties are likely to have several bract colors, due to speckles, marbling or variegations. The color combos can range from looking formal to being cheerfully random. Some new varieties also have bracts that are scalloped, twisted or curved, including the increasingly popular Christmas rose and winter rose poinsettias.

Recently a poinsettia with variegated leaves entered the market.

Also, retailers are offering spray-

painted poinsettias. Some plants

even come with a dusting of glitter.

Turn off the television.

Turn on their minds.



In school or at home, the newspaper is a textbook for life.

Encourage your children to make reading the newspaper a part of their everyday routine for lifelong learning.

The Goodland Star-News

1205 Main Ave. • 785-899-2338

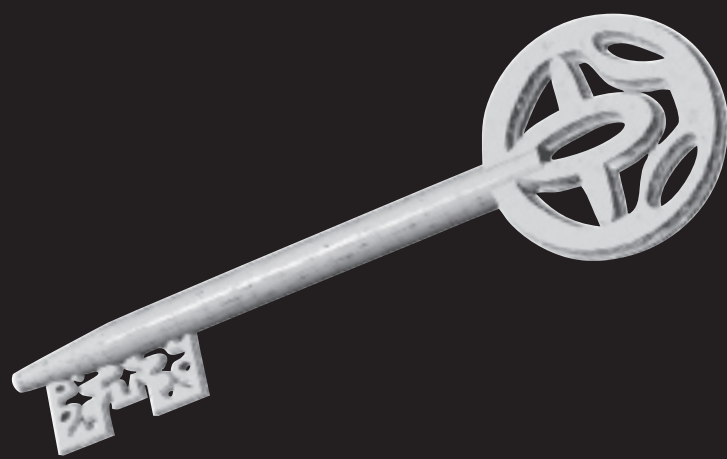
The Goodland Star News Service Directory

785-899-2338

Your KEY to business success.

Have your name up front when a customer needs you. Repetitive advertising is the key to opening the door to new customers.

Combined rates are available to feature your services in the Goodland Star-News and The Country Advocate.



Culligan
Better Water. Pure and Simple™ Quality Service since 1948

- * Drinking Systems
- * Water Softeners (Sales & Rentals)
- * Water Coolers
- * Salt Sales & Delivery

Scheopner's Water Conditioning, Inc.
904 Main, Goodland
(785) 899-2352

TRANE
It's Hard To Stop A Trane™

Bowman's Heating / Air Conditioning
577 W. 31st St., Goodland, KS
785-899-5770

season's greetings

To our valued customers, neighbors and friends... we hope the upcoming holidays are filled with blessings and joy!

NEWS

Subscriptions make great gifts!

Windy Plains Bike Shop
Professional bicycle repairs since 1978!
Parts, accessories and service for all makes
Pick up and delivery available in Goodland

**TIRED OF FLATS?
ASK ABOUT OUR NO FLAT GUARANTEE!**

Harold Snethen
6085 Rd. 17
(785) 899-4786 • (785) 899-5858 (home)
Same day service on most out of town repairs

Let us do the hard work!!

Call today to find out how this space WILL work for you!

(785) 899-2338

Cleaning Northwest Kansas one house at a time!

Pro Floor Care
Free Estimates

Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning Specialists
Commercial & Residential

* Advanced cleaning methods
* Affordable Quality Service * Spot & Spill Service
* Water Damage Restoration * VCT Tile & Ceramic Maintenance

Colby, Kan. (785) 462-8313 Toll Free (800) 473-4138
www.profloorcareandsupply.com

Proudly offering wide variety of cleaning products for Commercial and Residential

*We don't cut corners
We Clean Them*

Hendricks Realty, Inc.

Farm, Ranch, Residential & Commercial
Phone: (719) 346-7187 • 1401 Rose Ave., Burlington, CO
Mike Hendricks: (719) 340-0217 (cell #)
Broker & Certified General Appraiser
Debra Miller-(719) 340-0345 (cell #)
Broker Associate

www.hendricksrealtyinc.com

PLAINS HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING, INC.

FREE ESTIMATES! **Scott Sitzman** FREE ESTIMATES!
Residential & Commercial HVAC
New Installations-Replacements-Service
Phone: 785-890-2914 • Toll free: 800-678-2914
1104 Main Ave., Goodland, KS

"Serving Eastern Colorado for 35 years, and now serving Western Kansas!"

Discover the comfort of a Mendota Fire!
www.plainsheating.com

COMFORT SINCE 1948
LENNOX
PREMIER DEALER

The Decorating Co.

Interior Design Consultants
Irene Smith & Rochelle Kling

There's no limit to our imagination.

1011 Main Avenue, Goodland, KS 67735
(785) 890-5441
E-mail: decorco@st-tel.net

Committed to serving the Goodland area since 1972!

The Genuine. The Original.

W OVERHEAD DOOR

Weathercraft Roofing & Overhead Door
716 W. Highway 24, Goodland • (785) 899-3064

"Seek Shelter Today!"
LIFE • HOME • CAR • FARM • BUSINESS

SHELTER INSURANCE

Jim Alcorn, Agent
1624 S. Main Street
Goodland, KS 67735-0727
Business: (785) 899-2553

www.shelterinsurance.com

NEW SYSTEM PROFESSIONAL WINDOW CLEANING

Serving Northwest Kansas & Northeastern Colorado since 1992!

(785) 462-6995 OR (800) 611-6735
egriffith@st-tel.net

www.mywindowcleaner.net

Eldean and Janet Griffith 155 E. 5th, Box 692, Colby, KS

2003 PRESIDENT'S AWARD
Ford
2005 PRESIDENT'S AWARD

"Where Service is an Affair of the Heart"

DAN BRENNER FORD
222 W. HWY. 24, I-70 BUSINESS LOOP, GOODLAND, KS
(Toll Free) 800-636-8770
(Business) 785-899-2316 (Fax) 785-899-2317

Brandon's Carpentry

Drywall • Painting • Flooring • Roofing
Doors • Windows • Siding • Decks • Ramps
Small Building Construction • Garages and More

BRANDON LEE (785)332-3370
St. Francis, KS 67756 Cell: (785)332-5264

Serving the tri-state area.

Truck Lettering
800-886-2423

AWARD WINNING SIGNS AND PINSTRIPING SINCE 1974

Hot Brush 204 W. 4th Box 309
Bird City, Kan. 67731