

GOOD LIVING

Home, Style, Beauty, Health



THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

Moving beyond traditional red and green, poinsettia growers are hard at work developing breathtaking new varieties in the prettiest hues. We're smitten.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN LIEBE
TEXT BY MELISSA OZAWA



Twice As Nice
Two Premium 'Ice Crystal' poinsettia plants, placed in identical vases, have the same impact as a cut-flower display—but will last for weeks.

PROP STYLING BY SARAH VASIL



COME DECEMBER, you're almost guaranteed to catch sight of a poinsettia (or two, or three—*hundred*). They decorate homes, shops, and church altars, and appear in bright abundance, wrapped in foil, at supermarkets and nurseries throughout the country. The Mexican native (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is photoperiodic, meaning it blooms only when the days grow short during the colder months. And in the wild, its colors mirror classic holiday tones: green leaves and vivid-red bracts (modified leaves that resemble flower petals; the actual flowers are the tiny buds, called cyathia, in the center of the bracts). It's no wonder they've become a symbol of the season.

But horticulturists are trying to broaden the plant's horizons. "We challenge ourselves to see what we can hybridize," says Ruth Kobayashi, breeding manager at Ecke Ranch, in Encinitas, California, Dümmer Orange's largest poinsettia grower in the country. She and her colleagues cross different varieties to create ones the market hasn't seen before; today, their offerings span sophisticated shades of red, white, pink, green, and gold. "Even with all the technology we have, we work within the framework of what nature allows," Kobayashi says. "That's the fun of it. Nature always surprises us."

A Holiday Spectacular

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| <p>①
'Peppermint Ruffles'
Large, with wavy pale-pink bracts</p> | <p>⑥
'Autumn Leaves'
A breakthrough gold color for breeders</p> |
| <p>②
'Early Twilight'
A deep rosy-colored variety</p> | <p>⑦
'Princettia Pink'
A pale-pink hybrid</p> |
| <p>③
'Jinglebell Rock'
Dramatic, with red and white variegation</p> | <p>⑧
'Premium Lipstick Pink'
Hot pink with dark veining</p> |
| <p>④
'Envy'
Bright-chartreuse bracts</p> | <p>⑨
'Winter Rose'
White rosettes</p> |
| <p>⑤
'Sparkling Punch'
Pink with striking white centers</p> | <p>⑩
'Princettia Dark Pink'
A hybrid with bright-fuchsia bracts</p> |

MAKE THEM LAST

"Poinsettias are pretty robust," says Kobayashi. But to ensure they'll last for weeks in your home, place them in indirect sunlight, away from heating vents or cold, drafty windows. "When the soil feels dry to the touch, water thoroughly, letting it drain," she says. "Never let the pot sit in water." If you'll be using the plants as cut flowers, she recommends placing the stems under running water to let the milky sap run before adding them to an arrangement.