

Poinsettias

Name _____ Date _____

Adapted from: <http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/poinsettia.shtml>



Poinsettia plants are native to Central America, especially an area of southern Mexico known as 'Taxco del Alarcon' where they flower during the winter. The ancient Aztecs called them 'cuetlaxochitl'. The Aztecs had many uses for them including using the flowers (also known as bracts) to make a purple

dye for clothes and cosmetics and the milky white sap was made into a medicine to treat fevers. (Today we call the sap latex!)

The poinsettia became widely known because of a man called Joel Roberts Poinsett (that's why we call them Poinsettia!). He was the first Ambassador from the U.S.A. to Mexico in 1825. Mr Poinsett also founded the scientific institution in the U.S.A called the Smithsonian Institute. Poinsett had some greenhouses on his plantations in South Carolina, and while visiting the Taco area in 1828, he became very interested in the plants. He immediately sent some of the plants back to South Carolina, where he began grow the plants and sending them to friends and botanical gardens.

One of the friends he sent plants to was John Barroom of Philadelphia, who gave the plant to his friend, Robert Buist, a plantsman from Pennsylvania. Robert Buist was probably the first person to have sold the poinsettias under their botanical, or Latin name, name 'Euphorbia pulcherrima' (it means, 'the most beautiful Euphorbia'). It is thought that it became known as Poinsettia in the mid-1830s when people found out who had first brought it to America from Mexico.

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Questions

1. In which area of Mexico are poinsettias a native plant?
2. Where is this country?
3. What did the Aztecs use them for? List three uses.
4. What do we call the sap?
5. Who made the poinsettia widely known?
6. What was his job?
7. What is the botanical name for poinsettias?
8. Who was the first person to use their botanical name?
9. What are the main points of the article? (Write several sentences in your own words).

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Fill in the gaps with suitable words

A Mexican Legend about Poinsettias

There is an old Mexican _____ about how Poinsettias and Christmas _____ together, it goes like this.

_____ was once a poor Mexican girl called Pepita who had no _____ to give the baby Jesus _____ the Christmas Eve Services. As _____ walked to the chapel, sadly, _____ cousin Pedro tried to cheer _____ up. 'Pepita', he said 'I'm _____ that even the smallest gift, _____ by someone who loves him _____ make Jesus happy.'

Pepita didn't _____ what she could give, so _____ picked a small handful of weeds from the roadside and made _____ into a small bouquet. She _____ embarrassed because she could only _____ this small present to Jesus. _____ she walked through the chapel _____ the altar, she remembered what _____ had said. She began to _____ better, knelt down and put _____ bouquet at the bottom of _____ nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet _____ weeds burst into bright red _____, and all who saw them _____ sure they had seen a _____. From that day on, the _____ red flowers were known as _____ 'Flores de Noche Buena', or '_____ of the Holy Night'.

The _____ of the poinsettia flower and _____ are sometimes thought as a _____ of the Star of Bethlehem _____ led the Wise Men to Jesus. The red coloured leaves symbolize the _____ of Christ.

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Maths questions

1. Joel Roberts Poinsett the man who made the poinsettia widely known was the first US Ambassador to Mexico in 1825. How many years is it since then?
2. The red flowers usually have six petals, if I buy a plant with 7 flowers on it – how many petals are on the plant?
3. Write 1828 in words.
4. If I buy 5 plants from the garden centre at £3.00 a plant how much do the plants cost? If I have a £20 note how much change will I get?

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Teaching notes and answers

I used this resource in my functional skills classes as an end of term activity. My learners range from Entry 3 to Level 2, but this resource is best for Entry 3 / Level 1.

A Mexican Legend about Poinsettias (note – other words may be suitable).

There is an old Mexican **legend** about how Poinsettias and Christmas **come** together, it goes like this.

There was once a poor Mexican girl called Pepita who had no **present** to give the baby Jesus **at** the Christmas Eve Services. As **Pepita** walked to the chapel, sadly, **her** cousin Pedro tried to cheer **her** up. 'Pepita', he said 'I'm **sure** that even the smallest gift, **given** by someone who loves him will make Jesus happy.'

Pepita didn't **know** what she could give, so **she** picked a small handful of weeds from the roadside and made **them** into a small bouquet. She **felt** embarrassed because she could only **give** this small present to Jesus. **As** she walked through the chapel **to** the altar, she remembered what **Pedro** had said. She began to **feel** better, knelt down and put **the** bouquet at the bottom of **the** nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet **of** weeds burst into bright red **flowers**, and all who saw them **were** sure they had seen a miracle. From that day on, the **bright** red flowers were known as **the** 'Flores de Noche Buena', or '**Flowers** of the Holy Night'.

The **shape** of the poinsettia flower and **leaves** are sometimes thought as a **symbol** of the Star of Bethlehem **which** led the Wise Men to Jesus. The red coloured leaves symbolize the **blood** of Christ.

1. In which area of Mexico are poinsettias a native plant? Taxco del Alarcon, Southern Mexico
2. Where is this country? Central America
3. What did the Aztecs use them for? List three uses. Cosmetics, medicine, dye for clothes.
4. What do we call the sap? Latex
5. Who made the poinsettia widely known? Joel Roberts Poinsett.
6. What was his job? Ambassador from the U.S.A. to Mexico
7. What is the botanical name for poinsettias? Euphorbia pulcherrima.
8. Who was the first person to use their botanical name? Probably Robert Buist
9. What are the main points of the article?

Example only: The article describes where poinsettias come from and how they were used in ancient times. It also explains the origin of their name, how they came to be popular, and their link with Christmas.

1. Joel Roberts Poinsett the man who made the poinsettia widely known was the first US Ambassador to Mexico in 1825. How many years is it since then? Current date – 1825. E.g. 2011-1825 = 186 years
2. The red flowers usually have six petals, if I buy a plant with 7 flowers on it – how many petals are on the plant? $6 \times 7 = 42$
3. Write 1828 in words. Eighteen twenty eight (as a date). One thousand, eight hundred and twenty eight (as a number).
4. If I buy 5 plants from the garden centre at £3.00 a plant how much do the plants cost? If I have a £20 note how much change will I get? $5 \times £3 = \mathbf{£15}$. $£20 - 15 = \mathbf{£5}$