



Poinsettia passion

The star-like flower is a holiday favorite, especially in red

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON



others are splashed with contrasting colors.

"I personally have a favorite—a gorgeous burgundy," Eisley-Freeman said. "It's variety is Cortez Burgundy."

Nursery patriarch Earle Eisley, whose mother founded the nursery in 1932, has a poinsettia pick with a difference, too. "Dad's favorite is Ice Punch," Eisley-Freeman said. "[The bracts] have pink centers and red borders. It's really pretty."

This season, the poinsettias look especially nice, she noted. "They seemed to like the weather. Actually, they colored up real good."

Of course, Eisley's poinsettias stay indoors, out of the wind or rain.

"In Sacramento, they are indoor plants only," Eisley-Freeman said. "On a sunny day, maybe you can put them outside for a few hours. But they won't be happy."

Native to temperate coastal areas with winter highs in the 70s, poinsettias can be finicky. A member of the euphorbia family, they can't take too much cold or heat, preferring temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees.

Said Eisley-Freeman, "They're like Goldilocks; they like it just right."

In Southern California, poinsettias can be grown outdoors, where they reach 10 to 12 feet in height. "People move up here and they think they can still do that," she noted. "But it doesn't work up here."

"In Hawaii, they grow them as hedges," she added. "The first time I went and I saw them, I stopped the car to look! What was that red flower? I couldn't believe it."

Instead, we Sacramentans are content with our potted poinsettias and the smiles they bring each December.

"It's a Christmas tradition," Eisley-Freeman said. "Grandma used to have them; now we get them, too. It's the favorite for the holidays, part of our decorations and makes a great gift. It's the Christmas flower." □

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.

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