

## POINSETTIAS

### *La flor de Noche Buena*

The Aztecs called them *cuetlaxochitl*. They used the white sap from them to treat fevers and the red leaves to make a purple dye for clothes and cosmetics. The vibrant red we see on the plant and call leaves are actually bracts. The bracts are often referred to as “false flowers” because the plant's true flowers are so tiny that they hard to see. Bracts that surround flowers in a cluster are called involucre. Poinsettia flowers are small and light green to yellow, and they grow at the center of the red involucre.

The first US Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett, came to Mexico in 1825. He was intrigued with the beauty of the winter hardy plant and brought some back to his plantations so he and other botanists could study them. It is from his name that the flower gets its name, the poinsettia. The poinsettia is a huge industry in the US and the potted plants are seen everywhere during the holiday season.

One other interesting note: The milky white sap from the plant is used to make latex!



An old Mexican legend shares a story about a little girl who had no gift to give the baby Jesus at Christmas Eve mass. Pepita was very sad and her cousin, Pedrito, told her even the smallest gift given with love would make the baby Jesus happy. Pepita gathered a handful of weeds and fashioned them into a small bouquet. When she got to the church, she placed her small offering at the nativity in front of the altar. As she did this, the weeds blossomed into the flowers we now call *la flor de nochebuena*. Everyone felt they had seen a miracle and the flowers have forever been tied to the Christmas season. It is also said the flowers look like a star – the Star of Bethlehem that led the Three Kings to Jesus. And the brilliant red color also symbolizes the blood of Christ.

## MAKE YOUR OWN POINSETTIA ORNAMENT

### MATERIALS:

- red felt
- scissors
- pattern
- felt or fabric glue
- green or yellow felt for tiny dots
- yarn or string to hang the ornament

### HOW TO:

1. Trace the pattern and cut it out.
2. Place the star and five bracts (leaves) on the felt and cut one set for each ornament.
3. Glue one leaf on each part of the star with the centers touching.
4. Glue the dots in the center. Use stickers or beads or felt dots.
5. Glue the yarn or string on one point of the star to hang your ornament. Make more!

