



American Christmas Plant

➤ MOST OF our traditional holiday plants have stories of Christmas use that are as old as Christmas itself; even older, for evergreen boughs and holly and mistletoe were a part of the pre-Christian Yule feast of northwestern Europe that was bodily taken over and incorporated into the Christian calendar by the wise and adaptable missionaries who conquered that part of Heathenesse for the Cross.

But the poinsettia is a new thing, comparatively, for it is strictly an American plant, native to Central America and the moist tropics of Mexico. It was introduced into the United States only a little over a century ago, by J. R. Poinsett, then our Minister to Mexico. So solidly has it taken hold, even in that relatively brief time, that now it seems

as if it has always been part of the Christmas color scheme in this country.

Although its horticultural name is a deserved compliment to the man who first brought the poinsettia to us, the plant is actually a euphorbia, generically related to such native plants as the snow-on-the-mountain of the northern Plains, and the leafy spurge that is such a terrible weed in the West. It shows its botanical kinship in a number of ways, but especially by its milky juice, and its inconspicuous groups of flowers surrounded by very showy bract-like leaves.

For what we call poinsettia flowers are not flowers at all. Those inconspicuous little yellow nubbin things at the tips of the branches are the real flowers. The leaf-like character of the bright red members can easily be determined by comparing them with the green leaves farther down the stem.

The plant's botanical name, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, is a frank acknowledgment of its handsome appearance, for it translates into English as "very beautiful euphorbia."

Science News Letter, December 18, 1943

Books Off the Press

A.S.T.M. STANDARDS ON TEXTILE MATERIALS: With Related Information—A.S.T.M. Committee D-13—*Amer. Soc. for Test. Mat.*, 457 p., illus., \$2.25, paper.

THE AVIATION ANNUAL OF 1944—Reginald M. Cleveland and Frederick P. Graham, eds.—*Doubleday, Doran*, 224 p., \$3.50. Reviewing the achievements of the year 1943 with "forewords" by prominent men in the aeronautics field.

THE BIOCHEMISTRY OF MALIGNANT TUMORS—Kurt Stern and Robert Willheim—*Reference Press*, 951 p., \$12.

DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES: Mechanical Equipment—John Draney—*Amer. Tech. Soc.*, 472 p., illus., \$4. A practical treatise on the operation and maintenance of railway Diesel locomotives.

FOOD CRISIS—Roy F. Hendrickson—*Doubleday, Doran*, 274 p., \$2.50.

THE FORESTRY DIRECTORY—Compiled by Tom Gill and Ellen C. Dowling—*Amer. Tree Assn.*, 411 p., \$2.

GALAXIES—Harlow Shapley—*Blakiston*, 229 p., illus., \$2.50.

GLIDERS AND GLIDER TRAINING—Emanuele Stieri—*Duell, Sloan & Pearce*, 118 p., \$3. A beautifully illustrated book of instruction and reference.

HENRY S. PRITCHETT: A Biography—Abraham Flexner—*Columbia Univ.*, 211 p., illus., \$2.75.

INTER-AMERICAN EDUCATION: A Curriculum Guide—Effie G. Bathurst and Helen K. Mackintosh—*Gov't Print. Off.*, 66 p., illus., 15 c., paper. Bulletin 1943, No. 2.

LABORATORY MANUAL OF EXPLOSIVE CHEMISTRY: A simple, comprehensive treatment of propellants, Raw Materials, Nitrocellulose, Smokeless Powder, and High Explosives—Allen L. Olsen and John W. Greene—*Wiley*, 106 p., illus., \$1.75.

MAN THE MEASURE: A New Approach to History—Erich Kahler—*Pantheon Books*, 700 p., \$5.

A MANUAL OF MEDICAL PARASITOLOGY—Clay G. Huff—*Univ. of Chic.*, 88 p., \$1.50.

THE MIND OF THE INJURED MAN—Joseph L. Fetterman—*Industrial Med. Book Co.*, 260 p., illus., \$4.

PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS OF ELECTROCHEMISTRY—H. Jermain Creighton—*Wiley*, 477 p., illus., \$5. This is a fourth edition and Volume 1 of a two-volume set.

PYROTECHNICS: Civil and Military—G. W. Weingart—*Chem. Pub.*, 220 p., illus., \$5.

TECHNIQUES OF FISHPOND MANAGEMENT—Lawrence V. Compton—*Gov't Print. Off.*, 22 p., illus., 10c, paper.

Question Box

AERONAUTICS

What new invention eliminates the danger of a parachutist's getting caught in the plane's tail assembly? p. 397.

What use is being made of veteran Army airplanes? p. 397.

AGRICULTURE

How many cinchona plants were sent recently to South America? p. 395.

BOTANY

What Christmas plant is a native American? p. 400.

DENTISTRY

What solution has been found to be about 40-per-cent-effective in preventing tooth decay? p. 388.

EMBRYOLOGY

How can the breeding of certain fur-bearing animals be speeded? p. 399.

ENGINEERING

What new instrument can identify particles only 1/100,000th of an inch in diameter? p. 386.

GENERAL SCIENCE

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MEDICINE

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PUBLIC HEALTH

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