

Poinsettia primer

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Lynda Krabbendam grows poinsettia plants in Langley.

Photograph by: Bill Keay , Vancouver Sun

Today, the world poinsettia market is controlled by three key producers: Ecke, Fischer and Selecta, which was recently acquired by Chicago-based Ball Horticultural.

Most of the growing and breeding of new cultivars takes place in Central America. Cuttings are shipped to commercial growers all over North America and these growers produce crops for their home markets.

The process starts in June, when growers receive their order of root cuttings.

It takes five weeks to get these “plugs” properly rooted in six-inch pots. Next, the tops of the plants are pinched to promote bushiness. Growth retardant is used to keep some varieties from getting too tall and leggy.

In October, plants are given 13 hours of darkness each night to get them to set buds. This sometimes means growers have to use huge shade-curtains to block out excessive sunlight.

Breeders are concentrating on growing sturdier poinsettias that can stand up to the rigours of transportation and mishandling. Efforts are also being made to breed environmentally friendly hybrids that can be cultivated without the use of growth retardant.

Steve Whysall

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