

Poinsettia

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the lines arrive, they are placed in greenhouses and monitored several times a day. The temperature and humidity must be just right for their growing season – 65-70 degrees day and night and high humidity.

The daylight is important for the little trees also and 12 hours of darkness is also important for the plant's development. Gurney is lucky there aren't any streetlights close to the greenhouses to affect the light pattern. When all these processes work together, the poinsettias have lots of foliage to complement the sturdy bush and great color.

The summer growing season starts with two greenhouses with 1,500 lines of poinsettia tips and eventually Gurney spreads them out to include a third greenhouse.

July and August are growing months for the red plants although there isn't any red showing yet. In late August, the plants are all pinched back to the two-inch height again so several shoots sprout from the plant to make them bushy. Growth continues once again through September and in late October, a touch of color begins to show. The plants are then placed in bigger pots which include six and one-half inch, eight inch and ten inch pots. One line goes in the smaller pots but for the larger size, two or three tips are planted. The bigger the pot, the bigger the plant.

Gurney chooses tips that are North American varieties and hardier for this part of the country. Prestige Red is a traditional favorite and this year's new color is ice punch which is a lighter pink color with white veins in the blooms. He also has a purple or deep burgundy poinsettia along with the other favorite colors.

"We pretty much have ordered what we can handle and that has stayed the same over the years," Gurney said.

There is only so much greenhouse room and so many hands to do the work he added. Over half of the price of his poinsettias is for heating the greenhouses because the optimum temperature is so crucial. He supplements expensive heating fuel with wood burning stoves and cutting wood for the units is a continual workload.

In November, a hint of different colors begin to emerge and blossoms can be seen on the bushes. Sales do not begin until the day after Thanksgiving Gurney said. He

Murder Suspect Pleads Guilty To Manslaughter

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A Sudanese immigrant was beaten to death after a night of drinking in Sioux Falls because he refused to remove his sweater, according to one of the two men charged in his killing.

Jerome Ewing, 23, pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of manslaughter Tuesday in the June 2011 death of Geu Ayuel, 20, the *Argus Leader* newspaper reported. Dwight Ree, 19, pleaded guilty to the same reduced charge last month. Ree, who was 17 at the time of the killing, was charged as an adult.

Ewing told Judge Kathleen Caldwell that the three men had been at a party but left to buy cigarettes. Ree ordered Ayuel to remove his sweater, Ewing said, adding that he then told Ayuel — who went by the nickname Go Go — to flee.

"I told Go Go, 'You know dude gonna try and fight you, why don't you just run up outta here,'" Ewing said. "He didn't want to leave. He didn't want to look like he got punked or whatever."

Ewing said Ree attacked Ayuel and Ewing jumped into the fray. The two knocked Ayuel out in an alley then began to walk away, but Ree encouraged Ewing to return, according to Ewing.

"He went back over and started beating him and stomping him some more," Ewing said.

The two then repeatedly threw chunks of asphalt at Ayuel's head before running away.

Ree is scheduled to be sentenced Dec. 20 and Ewing on Dec. 21. Manslaughter carries a maximum punishment of life in prison, but their plea deals call for Ewing's prison time to be capped at 40 years and Ree's at 25 years.



Jay Gurney of Yankton Nurseries inspects this year's crop of poinsettias in his local greenhouse. One of the big cost factors in raising poinsettias is the electricity needed in keeping the heat up inside the nursery.

doesn't sell any before that time because the plants can go bad in a home, loose leaves, and temperature is still crucial.

"We are constantly running in the greenhouses checking the thermometer and the plants several times every day," said Gurney "One mistake and several plants suffer."

Despite it being a year that was dry beyond dry, Gurney said the poinsettias survived the heat very well. Part of this is because they are native to Mexico and used to hotter temperatures but it is due

in part to the excellent care the Gurney staff provides the seasonal plant.

"Since we do most of the work here, we don't have to worry about shipping and damage to the bushes and they keep their color and shape for a long time," said Gurney.

Several area churches have become regular customers over the years and there are several walk-in customers who come back year after year. Some churches even visit early and choose their plants so they are marked and set aside

while being kept in the right environment at the greenhouses until picked up before Christmas. They maintain their color and blooms so they last when placed in churches for Christmas celebrations. Right up to Christmas Eve day there will be poinsettia sales, Gurney said. The biggest week is during the middle of December. The Gurney staff also delivers in Yankton.

Thus, the poinsettia maintains its place in Christmas traditions — but not without a great deal of effort.

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