



Growing Guru



Nancy M. Eyster-Smith
neystersmith@bentley.edu
Waltham Garden Club



Although the gardening season has ended, our connection to plants really continues into the winter solstice and holiday season. Evergreens, which are mostly conifers, provide decorations as trees, wreaths, and swags, but holly, ivy, and mistletoe are important evergreens as well.



What may look like the colorful flowers of poinsettia are really bracts (modified leaves) that change color if they get 14 hours of darkness for a few weeks, as this one of mine that survived the summer is doing.



These are called Christmas rose and Christmas cactus, but mine bloom in April. All three of these plants exhibit [photoperiodism](#), i.e. they respond to the length of night or dark.

Read the Oak Spring Garden Foundation's [Plants of the Winter Solstice](#), including a bit about the commercial, political, and cultural history of poinsettia. A [Vermont horticulture professor](#) describes the types of plants and their meaning in different cultures. [USDA/US Forest Service Plant of the Week](#) webpage is beautifully illustrated and can lead you to explore additional native plants year-round.