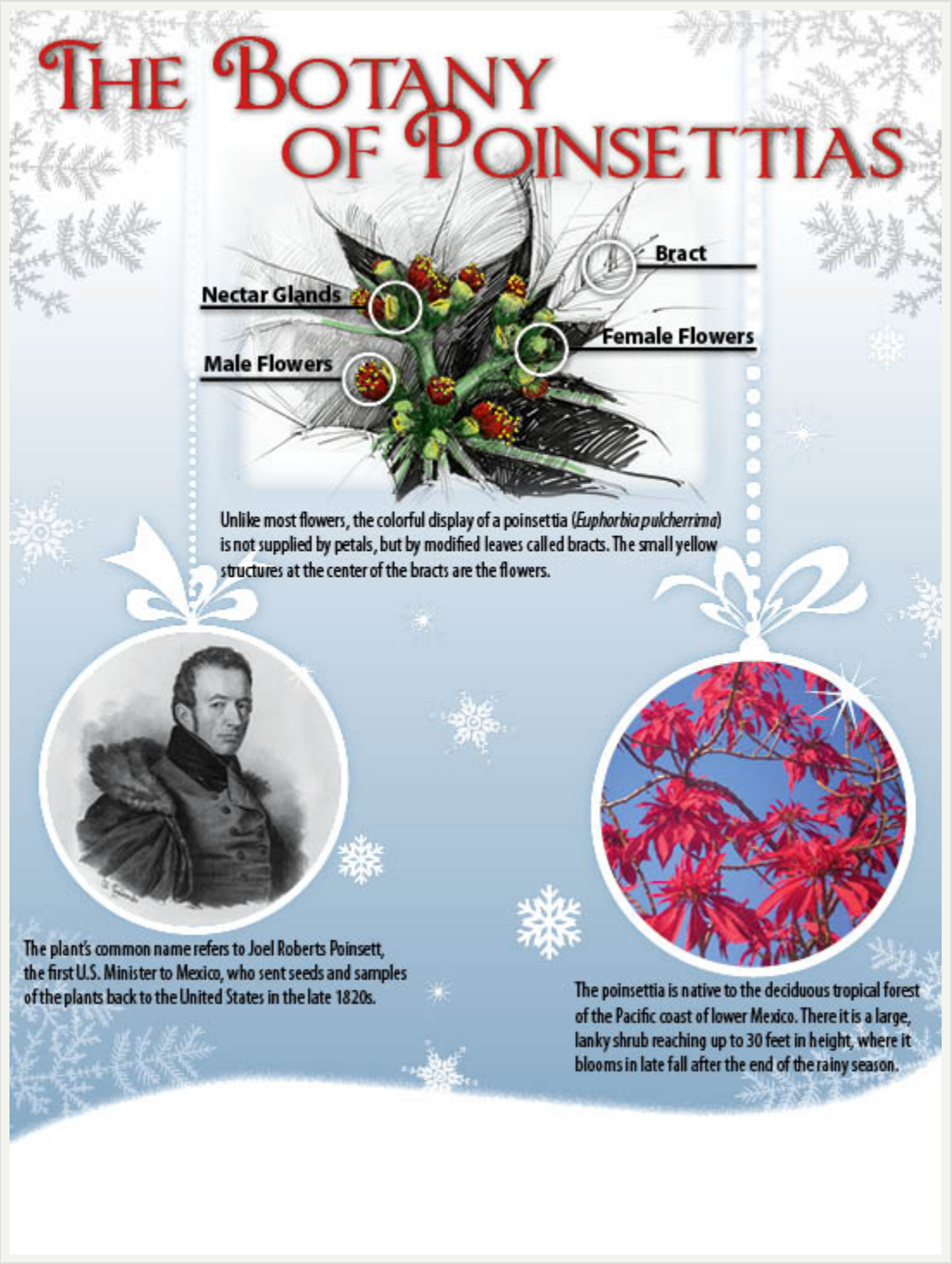
Poinsettias

Our conservatory is adorned with wreaths, garlands, living ornaments and one of the largest indoor decorated trees in Washington, D.C. The U.S. Botanic Garden features a living history of poinsettias in colors ranging from classic reds to pink, speckled and white. Many amazing poinsettia varieties are on display, including some heirloom varieties that are rarely available.



The Modern Poinsettia

During the 1800's, the poinsettia was a greenhouse curiosity often used as a short lived, but distinctive, red cut flower. It wasn't until the 1920s and 30s that additional colors were discovered and brought into trade.

Varieties that retained leaves during and after bloom were later developed, leading to a market for potted poinsettias. In the 1960s, the introduction of varieties that produced bushy, compact plants led to mass production and marketing. Radiation exposure of poinsettia tissue in the 1980s led to a proliferation of new color and growth forms available today.

Breeders continue to develop long-lasting poinsettias and more than 100 new cultivars are in development.

Beyond the Poinsettia

In Europe, the end of the year was traditionally celebrated by feasting and drinking. These ancient traditions continue into the present. In the mid-19th century, Victorian sentimentality combined with the new art of advertising led to many new traditions, such as decorating, gift giving and exchanging holiday cards. As the variety of plants in the marketplace has increased, people have found ways to include many exciting floral and fruiting plants into the holiday season.

Bromeliads

Bromeliads refer to a large family of plants that contain more than 3,000 individual species. Bromeliads come in many different shapes and sizes from the diminutive Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) to the delicious pineapple (*Ananas comosus*).

Kalanchoe

Kalanchoe has become a popular plant during the holidays because of its ease of growing and beautiful winter flowers. However, its leaves contain toxins that have been known to poison cattle in its native ranges in southern Africa and Australia.

Cyclamen spp.

Just like a potato, *Cyclamen* grows from an underground storage organ called a tuber. In its native Mediterranean climate, the tuber serves as a storage organ for the plant that allows *Cyclamen* to conserve resources during the many dry months of the Mediterranean summer.

Pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

Many ornamental varieties of the edible pepper plant (*Capsicum annuum*) have been developed in recent years. Botanically speaking, the fruit of a pepper is a berry since it derives from a single ovary.

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