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(54) **POINSETTIA PLANT NAMED 'EARLY JOY'**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A poinsettia plant named 'Early Joy' particularly characterized by the characteristics of unique red color in habit and bract. The plant is resistant to bract fading and is a long lasting cultivar. The plant has strong branch angles which reduce breakage of lateral branches during shipping. The bracts have shown resistance to botrytis and bract edge burn. No powdery mildew has been observed on leaves and bracts.

1 Drawing Sheet

BACKGROUND OF THE NEW PLANT

The present invention comprises a new and distinct cultivar of *Euphorbia pulcherrima* known by the varietal name 'EARLY JOY'.

The new cultivar was discovered in a planned breeding program and is a controlled cross of female Mikkelsen Seedling 93-209-1 (seed parent), unpatented with Mikkelsen Seedling, Breeding Stock No. 92-245-1, as male (pollen parent), unpatented. It was then grafted to Stock Plant No. 94-G-175 to make a branching type plant from the original non-branching seedling in 1994 at Lompoc, Calif. The graft was successful resulting in the seedling having the branching habit of 94-G-175 and retaining all other desirable characteristics. The plant was first asexually reproduced by cuttings thereafter in Lompoc, Calif. and has been repeatedly asexually reproduced by cuttings at Lompoc, Calif. Continued observations from the vegetative cuttings have confirmed that the distinguishing features of this new cultivar come true, remain stable and are retained through successive propagations.

The following traits are determined to be basic characteristics of this new cultivar which in combination distinguish this poinsettia as new and distinct:

1. Very early to flower from natural day-length thus eliminates need to black cloth for early sales.

2. Resistant to bract fading as plant ages and under low light levels of the home.

3. Long lasting cultivar.

4. Strong branch angles reduce breakage of lateral branches during shipping.

5. Bracts show resistance to botrytis and bract edge burn.

6. No powdery mildew has been observed on leaves and bracts.

The following characteristics distinguish the new Poinsettia from other cultivated Poinsettias of this type known to the inventor. The characteristics are described with comparative reference to the cultivars 'Orion Red' (unpatented) and 'Festival Red' (U.S. Plant Pat. No. 10,253).

1. 'Early Joy' has bracts colored Red Group 45A while 'Orion Red' has bracts of Red Group 46B and 'Festival Red' has bracts of Red Group 46A to 46B.

2. 'Early Joy' has ovate shaped bracts while 'Orion Red' and 'Festival Red' have oval shaped bracts.

3. 'Early Joy' has ovate shaped leaves while 'Orion Red' has oval shaped leaves.

4. 'Early Joy' has prominent leaf margin lobing while 'Orion Red' has trace leaf margin lobing.

5. 'Early Joy' has a similar bloom response time to 'Orion Red' of 7½ weeks while 'Festival Red' blooms at 8 weeks.

6. 'Early Joy' has similar bract diameters to 'Festival Red' of 25 to 30 cm.

7. 'Early Joy' has a mounded growth habit while 'Festival Red' has a semi-upright growth habit.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

The accompanying photographic drawing illustrates the new cultivar, the color being as nearly true as possible with color illustrations of this type. The photograph was taken under studio conditions seventeen weeks after rooted cuttings were planted in Lompoc, Calif.

DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW PLANT

The following detailed description sets forth the characteristics of the new cultivar. The data which defines these characteristics were collected from asexual reproductions carried out in Lompoc, Calif. The description of the plant is based on observations of a new plant propagated from the grafted plant with self-branching agent transferred. The plant history was taken on a plant grown in a 15 cm pot and was taken seventeen weeks after rooted cuttings were planted. Height measurements were taken from the soil line of the container. The test plants were grown under normal greenhouse conditions including 60–65° F. night temperatures and color readings were taken under natural greenhouse light. Color references are primarily to The R.H.S. Colour Chart of The Royal Horticultural Society of London except where general terms of ordinary dictionary significance were used.

The plant:

Classification.—Botanical — *Euphorbia pulcherrima*. Commercial — Early Joy.

Rooting habit.—Abundant, thick, fibrous roots.

Time to root.—14 days in summer at 21° C., 18 days in winter at 21° C. using a stem tip cutting 5–6 cm long.

Form.—Upright when apical meristem is removed (pinching), leaving five or more nodes above the soil line. Generally all lateral shoots will emerge and develop with the lower shoots emerging first and growing longest, resulting in a canopy of bracts over the upper two-thirds of the plant.

Habit and form of growth.—Strong thick stems with excellent branch angles that hold up the large bracts and reduce lateral branch breakage during shipping. Growth is vigorous but with proper growing schedules, it can be grown with no or little growth regulators.

Height.—25 to 30 cm.

Width.—45 to 50 cm.

Foliage: Leaves are alternate and borne on 5.5 to 6 cm petioles with a reddish purple cast. Last 3 to 4 leaves before true bract also turn the same red color.

Size.—Mature leaves are on average 10.5 to 11.5 cm long and 9.5 to 10.5 cm wide at broadest point near the basal area of the leaf. Leaves can vary greatly depending on the location of the plant.

Shape.—Ovate with acuminate apex and more truncate than rounded base.

Texture.—Upper — glabrous; Lower — glabrous and rugose because of protruding veins.

Margin.—Entire with pronounced lobing.

Color.—Young Foliage — Top side, Yellow-Green Group 146C. Under side, Yellow-Green Group 148B. Mature Foliage — Top side, Yellow-Green Group 147A. Under side, Green Group 147B. Leaf Petiole — Greyed-Purple Group 185A having an average width of 4 mm.

Veins.—Pinnate, Yellow-Green Group 146B on leaf underside.

Branching:

Branch color.—Yellow-Green Group 146B with a Red-Purple Group 60B cast.

Internode length.—15 mm.

Lateral stem length.—15 to 20 cm, basal is longest.

Flower:

Flowering habits.—Very early flowering cultivar. Apparently having a longer critical day-length for development of flower initiation. Under controlled day-length, development time is approximately 7 weeks, but temperatures above 70° F. will cause more rapid development without heat delay. The cyathia area of the bract is 4.0 to 4.5 cm in diameter.

Natural flowering season.—November 10 to 13 under Lompoc, Calif. conditions.

Flower time.—7 weeks under 11 hours of day-length at 20° C. Does not heat delay at night temperatures above 23° C. Heat delay is defined as the delay of flower bud initiation under short day conditions (about 10 hour day) and high night temperatures.

Cyathia:

Description.—In a tight cluster at the center of the bract and usually between 15 and 20 in number. Cyathia are stress tolerant, remaining in the involucre for a considerable time under low fertility, low light and high temperature conditions, even after the pollen is shed. Severe drying may cause cyathia to drop.

Color.—Yellow-Green Group 145A with reddish tip, Yellow-Green Group 146B with Red Group 46B tip at maturity.

Borne.—Prominent on short stalks staying tightly clustered without growing apart (splitting). Usually 4 to 4.5 cm in diameter; about 20 mm deep.

Quantity.—Highly dependent on cultural conditions with 15 to 20 cyathia per bract on a pinched plant.

Size.—Average length of 12 mm, average width of 6 mm.

Peduncles:

Length.—6 mm.

Aspect.—Upright to 45° angle depending on location.

Color.—Yellow-Green Group 146D.

Bracts:

Primary.—Shape — Ovate. Length — 13–14 cm. Width — 9–10 cm. Margin — Lobed.

Secondary.—Shape — Oblong. Length — 5.5–6 cm. Width — 3.5–4 cm. Margin — Entire.

Color.—Maturity — Red Group 45A. Young bract — Red Group 45B. Under side — Red Group 45A.

Bract aspect.—Flat.

Spread.—25 to 30 cm.

Number.—20 or more bracts per plant with usually 5 inflorescences per plant, but can vary depending on conditions. Bract diameter also varies depending on conditions, pinched or non-pinched and if growth regulators are applied.

Reproductive organs:

Stamens.—Number — Numerous. Anther Shape — Oblong, having an average length of 3 mm. Color — Red Group 53A. Filament Color — Red Group 53A. Pollen — Abundant, yellow.

Pistils.—Stigma Shape — Forked. Color — Red Group 53A. Style Color — Red Group 53A. Ovaries: Number — 3 when stigma is receptive. Size — 3 mm. Color — Yellow-Green Group 145A.

Nectar cups.—1 per cyathia, Yellow-Orange Group 15A.

Post production longevity: 30 days or longer.

Presence of fruit/seeds: No seeds on plants as need to be hand pollinated to get seed set. One seed set per female flower. Many flowers are only male.

Disease resistance: Bracts have shown resistance to botrytis and bract edge burn. No powdery mildew has been observed on leaves and bracts.

I claim:

1. A new and distinct variety of poinsettia plant as herein shown and described, particularly characterized by its unique red color and bract shape; resistance to bract fading; long lasting cultivar and strong branch angles which reduce breakage of lateral branches during shipping.

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