

Greenhouse Pest Message, October 9, 2025
Charles Krasnow, UConn Extension

Poinsettia stem breakage is a common malady of this crop. This year it has occurred in many greenhouses. When stem breakage occurs it is quite alarming, and may appear similar to *Pythium* root rot or other diseases. The cause of this issue is 1) varietal, 2) low calcium and magnesium fertility leading to weak attachment to the primary stem, and 3) improper spacing leading to weak outer branches. Damage from ringing the poinsettia plants can also cause the damage, however, careful placement of the ring will usually prevent this injury. There is not much that can be done to prevent lateral stem breakage other than maintain a good fertility program, and remove the detached branches which can desiccate and become a nutrient source for *Botrytis*. The plants usually fill out without any further issue.

An excellent overview from UMass can be found here: <https://www.umass.edu/agriculture-food-environment/greenhouse-floriculture/photos/lateral-stem-breakage-on-poinsettia>



Poinsettia plants with lateral stem breakage; stem showing the point of branch detachment. (all photos by C. Krasnow).



Poinsettia in the greenhouse showing stem breakage, note the wilting plants center right, center left, and upper center left.



Single plant with Pythium root rot, note the entire plant is stunted.