

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

(SCHLUMBERGERA BRIDESSII)

Christmas cactus is a member of the epiphytic cacti, native to South America. Plants grown indoors should ideally be placed in a south or west window with some protection from direct sun. If you prefer to move your plants outside in the summer, keep them in a semi-shady location. Too much direct sun can burn the leaves.

Christmas cactus should be potted in a well-drained potting medium. Christmas cactus is not as drought tolerant as their name implies. You will need to water your cactus when the soil is dry about half way. Waterings will vary depending on the surroundings (for instance a plant inside may not need watering as frequently as a plant grown outdoors). Keep plants moist in summer and when fall arrives water only enough to keep your plant from wilting.

When you are ready for your Christmas cactus to flower, follow these simple instructions:

1. Keep them in an area where the temperature does not exceed 55-60 degrees, for about 6 weeks. If the temperature remains in this range your cactus will develop buds on its own.
2. If your home is warmer than this (most usually are), you can control the amount of light and dark your plant gets. Simply put your plant into total darkness for 13 hours each day, if you want your cactus blooming for Christmas start around September or October. Once flower buds start to form, your plant can be moved to an area with normal lighting conditions. Only water your plant enough to keep it from wilting. Too much water can cause bud drop.

Christmas cactus are relatively disease and pest-free. However, overwatering or poorly drained potting mediums may cause root rot and result in collapse of roots. The plants root easily from stem segments. To start new plants, break off the healthy older branches and root the tops in fresh, clean sphagnum moss. Water sparingly until rooting occurs and new growth begins. Wilted segments, if not too badly damaged, will recover and become firm as new roots develop.

