

# How to Care for a Christmas Cactus (Schlumbergera Bredgesii)

## *Christmas Cactus Care Made Easy*

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Learning how to care for a Christmas Cactus (Schlumbergera Bredgesii) is pretty simple; and when successful, can keep these beautiful plants growing well all year round.

Despite its name, a Christmas cactus can add decor to your home during anytime of year, not just Christmas time. This is wonderful because their unusual segmented leaves form arching branches that baffle the eye; and in conjunction with their long tubular flowers, make fascinating conversation pieces.

### **Know the Difference between Christmas Cactus and Thanksgiving Cactus**

If you are seeking care instructions because you plan to purchase this plant, it is important to assure that when shopping for a Christmas Cactus, you do not confuse it with its sister Schlumbergera known as the Thanksgiving Cactus or Crab Cactus. If you already have a Christmas Cactus, (or at least think you do), you might want to double check. Nurseries sometimes confuse these two cacti because they look very much alike.

The best way to tell a Christmas Cactus and a Thanksgiving Cactus (Schlumbergera Truncata) apart is to inspect the edges of their flat, segmented branches. Although both plant varieties have smooth bright green leaves, Thanksgiving Cacti leaves are toothed or thorny looking alongside their edges.

These teeth are what give Thanksgiving Cacti the nickname Crab Cactus. Christmas Cacti do not have teeth. Their edges are simply smooth and scallop looking. They also have more scallops than Thanksgiving Cacti have.

### **Christmas Cactus Growing Climate**

Although Christmas Cacti favor rainforest like climates, and love living beneath jungly canopies, they may be grown indoors or outdoors in other types of climates.

When grown outdoors, providing Christmas Cacti with shade for half the day during summer encourages their growth. In contrast, providing them with warmth during winter months keeps them from freezing. Thus, during winter, take plants indoors or cover them with light fabric where temperatures fall below 50 degrees.

### **Prompting Flowers to Bloom During the Holidays**

Enjoying the Christmas Cacti's long, tubular, mass-petaled blooms during the holidays is the reason most people buy Christmas Cacti. Their rosy, somewhat purplish, red flowers are much easier to savor when placing plants about the internals of the home where people mostly frequent than they are out of doors. This is why growing cacti houseplants is often preferred over outdoor methods. To prepare your cacti for flourishing during Christmas time, use the following tips.

- Whether your plants are to be grown indoors or outdoors they need soil that is rich and porous. Add leaf mold and sand to heavy soil to aid drainage.
- Water your cacti frequently enough to maintain moist, but not soggy, soil. Misting plants during hot summer months provides them additional water without the risk of root rot.
- Fertilizing every seven to ten days is quite helpful when trying to spur flowers. Use a liquid fertilizer for best results.

- For the purpose of encouraging flowers, keep plants in areas where temperatures are less than 70 degrees at nighttime. Christmas Cacti prefer cooler nighttime temperatures and excess evening heat could cause them to lose their buds.
- If possible, place plants in dark rooms for half days. Darkness also encourages budding. The best time to do this is during the month of September. Once budding occurs, move plants back to lighted areas.
- Sometimes cutting back a bit on watering encourages cacti buds to flower. If you decide to cut back, however, keep a close eye on the plants to make sure buds are flowering not falling; and leaves are not wilting. Once flowers begin to bloom, reconvene normal watering habits.
- After flowering has ended but prior to budding season, it is a good idea to re-pot Christmas Cacti if you want your plants to grow bigger. Re-potting only needs to be done every two to three years however.

One of the best things about growing and caring for Christmas Cacti is that you can cut or break leaf segments and plant them to grow new plants. The segments usually root themselves fairly easily. You can save money you would otherwise spend on more plants and use it to purchase some beautiful pots instead.