

# Thanksgiving Cactus Plant Care

## *How to Care for a Thanksgiving Cactus Often Called Crab Cactus Schlumbergera Truncata*

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Do not let the term “Thanksgiving Cactus” prevent you from embellishing your home with this beautiful plant all year long. Regardless of name, Thanksgiving Cacti can add decor to your home during anytime of year, not just Thanksgiving time.

Thanksgiving Cacti are a lot like Christmas Cacti. Both plants have segmented leaves, form arching branches, grow tubular flowers from pointy buds, are pleasing to the eye, and fun to discuss.

Knowing the differences between the two plants is important if you plan to purchase and care for them and more so if you plan to gift them. You want to know which plant you are caring for so you do not pass incorrect information. Likewise, you do not want to tell someone a plant is one type of cactus when it is actually the other type.

If you do mix up the two cacti, however, do not feel too bad. The fact is nurseries often sell Thanksgiving Cacti as Christmas Cacti. If nurseries can mix up the two – why should laypersons not do the same?

The best way to tell a Thanksgiving Cactus from a Christmas Cactus is to examine the edges of its flat, segmented branches. Upon examination, you should notice that despite the likeness of the plants' smooth leaves, Thanksgiving Cacti leaves are pointy or toothed compared to smoother scalloped leaves on Christmas Cacti.

Although Thanksgiving Cacti are nicknamed for their thorny looking teeth, the teeth are not as pokey as they look – at least not in younger plants. You can rub your finger against the teeth – even press into the teeth without puncturing your finger. So if you hear these beauties referred to as Crab Cactus – their nickname – you can rest assured they will not puncture you the way a crab will.

Like Christmas Cacti, Thanksgiving Cacti favor rainforest like climates and are native to jungle canopies. Just the same, however, Thanksgiving Cacti can grow outside their natural habitats, either indoors or outdoors, when provided proper care.

Caring for Thanksgiving Cacti is quite simple and requires little effort. When growing outdoors, give them plenty of shade for half the day during summer to keep them from shriveling up. During winter, give them plenty of warmth to prevent them from freezing. In some climates, it is also wise to bring Thanksgiving cacti indoors or at least cover them with lightweight fabric. This is essential when growing crab cacti where temperatures fall below 50 degrees.

Thanksgiving Cacti often bloom beautiful scarlet flowers from November to March. Their scarlet coloring makes it easy to confuse them with Christmas Cacti that happen to be more of a purple-red. Thanksgiving Cacti blooms may also come in salmon, pink, white and orange.

Growing Thanksgiving Cacti indoors allows you to enjoy your plants more than you will if you place them outdoors. This

method also beautifies your home and keeps it more pleasant for your guests.

*Easily prepare Thanksgiving cacti for flourishing through Thanksgiving time using the following tips:*

- Plant Thanksgiving cacti in rich porous soil. Soil drainage is vital whether these plants are grown indoors or outdoors. Do not leave them in soggy soil. Leaf mold and sand can improve soil that is too heavy, and thus aid drainage.
- Water your cacti frequently. However, again, take care not to let the soil become soggy. If watering frequency or amount of water applied is leaving the soil too moist, cut back on the watering. Misting plants during hot summer months, especially out of doors, is great for giving your cacti added doses of moisture without drenching their roots.
- Increased fertilization spurs flower growth. So to encourage blooms, fertilize your cacti every seven to ten days until buds appear. The best way to do this is through use of a good liquid fertilizer.
- Another way to encourage flowering is to keep plants in dark cool areas during the night. Besides, Thanksgiving Cacti prefer cooler nighttime temperatures around 70 degrees. Furthermore, excess evening heat often causes buds to fall from these plants.
- Placing plants in dark rooms for about twelve hours a day is also helpful to incite budding. September is the best month to enact this process. Following budding, go ahead and replace plants in their normal locations or some other areas with ample lighting.
- Reducing the amount of water you give Thanksgiving Cacti may also encourage them to grow buds and to flower.

Cutting back on water can be tricky, however, so if you use this technique, be sure to keep a sharp eye on your plants. Make certain buds flower and do not fall. Make certain the leaves do not wilt. In addition, of course, reconvene normal watering habits once flowers begin blooming.

- Re-potting Thanksgiving Cacti is a great way to grow bigger plants. The best time to re-pot is following their blooming period. Re-pot your plants every two or three years, or anytime roots begin to extend from holes at pot bottoms, or if ever you suspect they need bigger pots.

Gifting Thanksgiving Cacti can be fun and you accomplish this easily. Simply cut cacti segments from your plant and set them straight up in pots of porous potting soil. Keep the soil moist until the segments take root. Then water as you would an older cactus. When planning to present these cacti as gift, plant them in new pots soon enough in advance to give them time to root themselves in the new soil. A few weeks to a couple of months should suffice.