

Christmas Cactus

Schlumbergera

A tree cactus, this epiphyte is native to the jungle of South America. Extensive hybridizing has produced flowers in shades of cerise, salmon, pink, violet, white and pale gold, among others.

Place your plant in a bright window (not north facing) but out of the hot sun. An east facing window, or south facing window with filtered sun, should be ideal. Keep the soils consistently moist, not soggy, and fertilize every other week with a balanced houseplant fertilizer during active growth and flowering.

Christmas cacti may be placed outside in a shady location when the evening temperatures are safely above 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Water and fertilize as before.

This summer outing allows the new growth to "harden" and will prepare your Christmas cactus for the ensuing "rest period".

The flowering of Christmas cactus is related to, and induced by, the length of day and night temperatures. If the plant receives an extended period of 50-55 degree nights, flower buds will form regardless of how many hours of darkness the plant receives. A plant left outdoors until just before the first frost is likely to have had enough cold nights to have formed it's buds before it is brought indoors. But if the night temperatures are in the 60-65 degree range, or higher, the plant will need 12 to 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness every night. Either move the plant to a dark unlighted room, or cover the plant with a dark opaque cloth or box.

During the fall, after new growth has matured, stop fertilizing and give the plant only enough water to keep the green stems from shriveling. After flower buds appear, night temperatures and day length no longer matter. When flower buds appear, resume regular watering and fertilizing and place in its bright window until you are ready to begin the cycle again.

Christmas cactus flower best when somewhat pot bound, although a loss in flower production may indicate that the plant needs repotting. Use a well-drained, peat-based potting mix.

Propagation is made from terminal stem sections at any time of the year.