

# Christmas Cactus

Christmas cactus is one of the most popular type of holiday cactus (*Schlumbergera* species). Other species of holiday cactus bloom at different times of the year and have slightly different growth habits.

## Light

A cool, bright spot out of direct sun, drafts, heat sources is best. Keep one on display near an east-facing window. Too much summer sun may turn leaves a reddish color or cause them to go limp.

## Water

Christmas cactus is not as drought tolerant as its desert relatives and will wilt under drought stress. Before watering, check soil moisture with your index finger. Water thoroughly when the top inch of soil dries out. The length of time between watering varies with air temperature, amount of light, humidity and growth rate. Plant in well-draining organic potting soil.

## Fertilizer

Fertilize plants monthly from the time new growth starts in early spring, and throughout the summer using a balanced water soluble fertilizer. Reduce fertilizer during the fall and early winter.

## Blooming

The Christmas cactus flowers best when kept somewhat pot bound. Christmas cacti will bloom if they are subjected to cool temperatures of about 50 to 55 degrees F, or they undergo at least 12 hrs. of dark at night. After flower buds form, you can stop the cool/dark treatment and start fertilizing for a strong three-week bloom cycle. Plants should be blooming for the holidays if cool treatments are started by early November.

## Repotting

Repotting is necessary only about once in every three years. When roots start to mat where they touch the inside of the pot, move the plant into a container that's an inch or 2 larger in diameter. Gently loosen matted roots before you repot.

Pruning your Christmas cactus after bloom will encourage the plant to branch out. Remove a few sections of each stem by pinching them off with your fingers or cutting with a sharp knife. These sections can be rooted in moist soil to propagate new plants.