



Christmas Cactus

We typically think of cacti as being heat tolerant, but Christmas cactus keeps blossoms longer in cooler temperatures. Keep it in a well-lit location away from drafts from heat vents, fireplaces and other sources of hot air. Drafts or temperature extremes can cause buds to drop before they have a chance to open.

WATER

Christmas cactus is a tropical type plant, not quite as drought tolerant as its desert relatives and, in fact, may drop flower buds if the soil gets too dry. The plants will wilt when under drought stress. Water thoroughly when the top inch or so of soil feels dry to the touch. The length of time between watering will vary with the air temperature, amount of light, rate of growth and relative humidity.

FERTILIZER

The plant does not particularly need to be fertilized while in bloom, but most gardeners enjoy the challenge of keeping the plant after the holidays for re-bloom the next year. While plants are actively growing, use a blooming houseplant-type fertilizer and follow the label directions for how much and how often to feed.

LIGHT

While the Christmas cactus can adapt to low light, more abundant blooms are produced on plants that have been exposed to more light intensity. Keep plants in a sunny location indoors. They can be moved outdoors in summer to a shady or semi-shady location. Leaves may start to turn a bit red if exposed to excessive light, and too much direct sunlight can actually burn the leaves or cause them to become limp. When it's time to bring plants inside for fall, slowly adjust them to life indoors by gradually increasing the number of hours they spend indoors each day.

REPOTTING

If your plant tends to dry out and/or wilt frequently, it may be time to repot it into a slightly larger container. Well-drained soil is a must for Christmas cactus. Use a commercially packaged potting mix for succulent plants or mix your own by combining two parts plain potting soil with one part clean sand or vermiculite.

PRUNING

Pruning your cactus after blooming will encourage it 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 to propagate new plants.

RE-BLOOMING

Christmas cactus will bloom if given long, uninterrupted dark periods (12 hours each night). Begin dark treatments in mid-October to have plants in full bloom by the holidays. You can place plants in a dark closet from 8 pm-8 am each night for 6-8 weeks or until you see buds forming. Christmas cacti will also bloom if they are subjected to cool temperatures of 50°- 55° by early November, thus eliminating the need for dark treatments.



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