

Christmas Cactus

Schlumbergera bridgeseii



NEW GARDEN
LANDSCAPING & NURSERY

newgarden.com
email: info@newgarden.com

New Garden Gazebo
3811 Lawndale Dr.
Greensboro, NC 27455
phone: 336-288-8893

The Christmas Cactus grows each year by branching out from the stem joints each spring. Branches of young plants are quite upright, but they begin to hang as they become longer. The entire branch reaches a length of about 12".

The scentless flowers are elongated and somewhat trumpet-shaped. They can range in color from white through shades of red and pink, and can include intense violets shades. The plant is a native of the tropical rain forests of Brazil, where it grows as an epiphyte in cracks in the rocks. There the plants have just enough humus to allow the roots to cling to the ground. Some varieties of this plant bloom at different times of the year.

Growing Tips

The Christmas Cactus needs as much light as possible and must be kept cool during its rest periods. When the flower buds start to show, the plant should be moved to regular room temperature. Avoid direct sunlight.

Water sparingly in the rest periods (during February - March and July - August). Provide a weak fertilizer solution in the April - June growth period. Only large plants need feeding during September and October when the buds are forming. (See page 2 for more details on its growth cycle.)

These cacti should be repotted every three to five years at the beginning of the growth period. Always use a light soil (commercial cactus soil is fine); it's essential that the soil drain freely.

Remove weak, budless stem joints in September and October. Propagation can be done easily by placing healthy stem joints in moist sand.

Christmas Cactus shows its glory best when displayed alone. It makes a lovely table centerpiece, but you'll find it's decorative in any spot. Several plants grouped in a copper container make a gorgeous seasonal show.

The Christmas Cactus in bloom is really delightful. The profusion of flowers seems to glow, and it's satisfying to know that the right care will bring your plant into bloom year after year. In fact, we've seen pictures of "heirloom" Christmas Cacti that have been passed from generation to generation for as long as a hundred years!

Annual Rhythm

It is important to provide the correct amount of water, food and rest at the proper periods. Flowering will also depend on the length of daylight hours and the sur-



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rounding temperature.

February-March

When flowering is over, the plant needs to rest. Water it sparingly, without letting the stems shrink. If possible, move the plant to a cool, bright location.

April-June

Start to water more from the beginning of April. The winter period is over, and the cactus will start to grow again. New shoots will be clearly visible at the tip of each stem. Pot in April if needed, and then feed a couple of times over the next months. Use a standard cactus soil through which the water can easily drain. The roots are weak and will rot if the soil is too wet.

July-August

Now the second rest period begins. Reduce watering and place the plant in a warm, sheltered spot in the garden, if possible. Be sure to protect it from the burning rays of direct sunlight.

September-February

If the cactus has been outside, bring it in, checking for any insects first. As soon as there is any sign of flower buds, start to increase watering again. The cactus must never lack water or be moved around too much while producing flowers; otherwise the buds can simply drop off the plant.

The Plant Doctor

Problem: The cactus starts to shrivel in its rest period.

Diagnosis: It needs more water. Give it a good soak in a bowl of water or the sink, and then let it drain well after about half an hour.

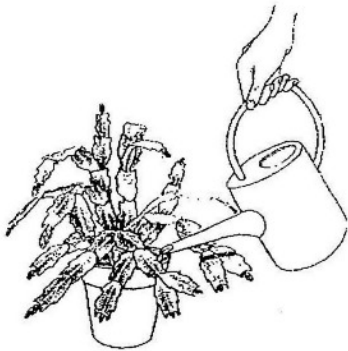
Problem: Crown rot.

Diagnosis: This is a sign that the roots are rotting. The plant has either been overwatered or the soil mixture is wrong. The plant cannot survive for much longer, so take healthy cuttings and get new plants started.

Problem: The buds fall off.

Diagnosis: The plant has been moved too much or has had too little water during the time it sets its buds. Give it a little more TLC and see what happens. You may simply need to wait for the next bloom cycle to watch it display its beauty,

Try a Christmas Cactus this year! The plant you buy now may become tomorrow's heirloom!



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