



# J&L Garden Center

The All Season Gift  
and Garden Center

620 North 500 West Bountiful, Utah 292-0421

## Christmas Cactus

[www.JLGardenCenter.com](http://www.JLGardenCenter.com)

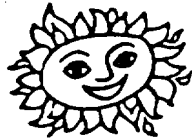
Christmas Cactus can add a little interest and variety to your houseplant collection. They are different than most houseplants and are very easy to take care of. Christmas Cactus produce an abundance of flowers and can flower for six weeks, or longer. Unlike regular cactus plants, Christmas Cactus prefer humid, moist conditions with only moderate sunlight. Christmas Cactus grow naturally in the tropical rain forests; not in the hot, dry deserts.

The Christmas Cactus belongs to the plant genus **Schlumbergera**. They were previously classified in the plant genus **Zygocactus**. Even though the classification has been changed, most people still refer to the Christmas Cactus as a Zygocactus. Originally, Christmas Cactus were only available in red. Through years of plant breeding, they are now available in several different shades of red, white, pink, purple, yellow, and salmon.



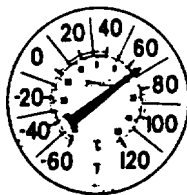
### Light

Christmas Cactus prefer indirect, moderate light, which means they should be within three feet of a south, west, or east window. They do not like being placed in direct sunlight, where they may sunburn easily. Christmas Cactus will not grow well in a north window without extra, artificial lighting. When you put your Christmas Cactus outside during the summer be sure to grow it in partial shade; not full sun. Long periods of strong, direct sunlight will sunburn them.



### Temperature

Christmas cactus are sensitive to cold temperatures. Keep your Christmas Cactus warm most of the year. Try to keep your plants between 65 to 90 degrees from November through September. Cool your plants down during the fall to help stimulate flower formation. Keep your plants between 50 to 60 degrees from September until they start to bloom in November. Do not ever let them get lower than 45 degrees!



### Fertilizer

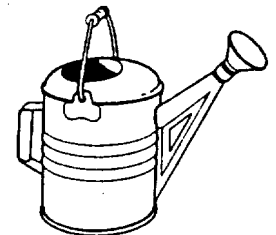
Fertilize Christmas Cactus every three or four weeks with either **Schultz All Purpose Plant Food**

or **Miracle Gro All Purpose Plant Food**. Fertilize them regularly from the time they start to bloom in November until the end of the summer (August). Don't fertilize them during the fall when you are trying to get them to start blooming. Wait until after they start to bloom to fertilize them.



### Watering

Unlike the cactus name suggests, Christmas Cactus prefer moist soil, not dry soil. Keep the soil moist from the time the flower buds appear in November through the end of summer.



Let the soil dry out a little from September until the flower buds begin to show in November; then start keeping the soil moist again. If you keep the soil too dry the stems will shrivel. If you keep the soil too wet the roots will rot and the flower buds drop prematurely. Consistent soil moisture is the key to growing Christmas Cactus successfully.

### Flowering

To make Christmas Cactus bloom for Christmas they must have cool temperatures, dry soil, and short days (long nights) starting in September. Christmas

Cactus must have at least thirteen hours of continuous darkness each night for at least eight to ten weeks before they will start to bloom. You may have to put your cactus in a closet during the night to provide this amount of darkness. If your plants receive artificial light during the night, they will probably not bloom on time. Start this "closet treatment" early in September. Keep up the "closet treatment" until buds begin to show in November. Cut back the amount of water you give your plants during this period and keep the plants cool. After the flower buds begin to form move your plants back into normal light. Start fertilizing them more often and watering them regularly to help the flower buds open properly. Do not just leave your Christmas cactus in the closet all day. Be sure to put your Christmas Cactus in a bright sunny window during the day.



## Common Problems

The most common problem of the **Christmas Cactus** is the flowers dropping off prematurely. This problem can be caused by:

**1. Sudden changes in temperature**, either too hot or too cold. Do not put your plant in front of a furnace vent or next to a doorway. Be careful when you transport your plants during the winter. Protect them from the cold weather.



**2. Dramatic changes in light**, either in the day length or the light intensity. Don't forget to bring the plants out of the closet during the day if you are trying to limit their light using the "Closet Treatment". Don't move your Christmas Cactus from one location to another once the buds begin to form.

**3. Occasionally a plant may produce too many blossoms for the roots to support.** If the soil becomes too dry or too wet the roots may not be able to continue to support all the blossoms it produced. It is common for a few blossoms just to fall off for no reason at all.



**4. Ethylene gas causes flowers to drop prematurely.** Do not keep your plants in their protective sleeves longer than necessary. Do not put Christmas Cactus next to fruit, especially the older, extra ripe fruit. Exhaust fumes also contain high amounts of ethylene gas.

## Easter Cactus

Even though Christmas Cactus and Easter Cactus may look similar they belong to completely different genera. Easter Cactus belongs to the plant genus **Rhipsalidopsis** while Christmas Cactus belongs to the genus **Schlumbergera**. Easter Cactus grow more upright than Christmas Cactus, but they still have the typical drooping stems. Easter Cactus flowers are typically a little longer than Christmas Cactus and can grow up to three inches long. Easter Cactus flowers will be upright or horizontal, not drooping like the Christmas Cactus. Easter Cactus also have a more rounded stem than the Christmas Cactus. The main difference between Christmas Cactus and Easter Cactus is their blooming time. Easter Cactus bloom in the spring (April and May) while Christmas Cactus bloom in the winter (November to January). Easter cactus may bloom again in September if the growing conditions are right.



Take care of your Easter Cactus the same way you care for your Christmas Cactus during the summer. Water and fertilize them regularly. Keep them warm and give them indirect light during the spring and summer. Easter Cactus do not generally need any special treatment to help them bloom in April. Mother nature usually provides the right amount of darkness. If you want your Easter Cactus to bloom in September start limiting its light in August. When you start limiting the light, make sure you reduce the amount of water you give your plants, reduce the amount of fertilizer you apply, and keep your plants cool.