

Christmas Cactus Care

Christmas cactus are the perfect Holiday gift, living and continuing to bloom year after year, in some cases even being passed down to succeeding generations of owners. They are usually kept as house-plants but can be grown outdoors in partial shade if protected from frost and freeze.

Indoor Care

In the home, Christmas cactus should be located in bright, indirect light and around 65°. Avoid extreme environmental changes such as would occur near doors, drafty windows and heat sources such as fireplaces and heat vents. Water when the top inch of soil has dried. The whole pot should not be allowed to completely dry out, but also make sure the pot is draining well. If your cactus is in full bloom, water only very lightly for the next 6 weeks to give it a resting period. Resume regular watering when new growth starts to appear. Fertilize every 1 to 2 months during the growing season (April to September) with a fertilizer for flowering plants.

After-Bloom Care

About a month after the bloom period, you can prune your cactus to promote a bushier plant. Prune where the leaf segments attach to each other. Cuttings containing 2 to 3 segments can be allowed to dry for a day then inserted in moist growing media to grow new plants. Plants can be repotted every 2 to 3 years into fresh potting soil (a mix of 3 parts potting soil to 1 part sand is good) but don't increase the pot size significantly as the plants bloom best when root-bound.

Next Year's Bloom

Christmas cactus are driven by both photoperiod and temperature to form flower buds. After several weeks of 12 hours of darkness and cooler temperatures around 50° to 60°, buds will start to show. Be sure the plant receives no artificial light at night during this time to disrupt the 12 hours of darkness. It is beneficial to decrease watering during this time also. You can either allow nature to direct the timing of your next flowering period or you can artificially adjust light and temperature to produce blooms after a couple months. When conditions start to change about mid-October, you can expect blooms around the Holidays.