

# Christmas Cactus

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A beautiful holiday plant, blooms at Christmas and also sometimes around Easter time if cared for properly. A month prior to Christmas you will be able to watch the tips of the leaves beginning to grow. The tips grow darker as each day passes, until a bud forms. At Christmas time, as if by magic, the buds open to a beautiful flower that will add color and warmth to any holiday season.

## 7 Steps to Taking Care of Your Christmas Cactus

### 1. Light

A Christmas cactus will appreciate bright but indirect light. Keep the plant in a well-lit location, away from direct sunlight, draft, heat vents, fireplaces or other sources of hot air. It is best to keep in a normal house temperature range (65-80 degrees F).

### 2. Humidity

Provide a source of humidity if you live in a dry environment. Put a tray of water next to the plant so that the water evaporates and provides humidity. Alternatively, you can make a humidity tray by placing the pot in a waterproof saucer that is filled with gravel and halfway filled with water.

### 3. Water

Water your Christmas cactus with plenty of care. Caring for this plant can be a bit tricky as you need to take care not to over water or underwater it. This variety can't tolerate completely dry soil, if the soil gets too dry the flower buds will drop and the plant will wilt. Feel the soil with your fingers, if it feels dry, its time to water. Too much watering will cause spots from white rot to appear on the leaves, and the leaves will likely fall off. Never water the top of the plant.

### 4. Fertilizer

Plants that are actively growing should be given blooming houseplant-type fertilizer. Follow the label directions for how much and how often to feed. Fertilizing is important to keep the plant in good condition; the joints are fragile and can break apart if the plant descends into poor health.

### 5. Blooming

The key to getting Christmas cactus to flower during the holiday season is proper light exposure, correct temperatures and limited watering. Keep in a dark bathroom for the night. During the fall months, the Christmas cactus should be placed in a spot where it receives indoor indirect, bright light during the daylight hours but total darkness at night. Begin the dark treatments in about mid-October to have plants in full bloom by the holidays. Be careful with watering at this time. Reduce the watering slightly. Do not soak the soil after a dry period; only moisten the top few inches, since buds, flowers and even leaves can fall off if the roots are suddenly saturated.



### 6. Pruning

Prune the Christmas cactus about a month after blooming. This will encourage the plant to branch out, especially after a period of "rest" has been granted. It will not look very pretty after the blossoms have faded.

### 7. Propagate

Propagate a Christmas Cactus by cutting off sections of the stem. Each section must consist of two or three joined segments. Allow each section to dry for a few hours before pushing them into a 3-inch pot that contains the same amount of potting soil as the parent plant. Plant halfway down the first segment. Treat the cutting as mature plants. In about four to six weeks, the cuttings should have rooted and will begin to show some new growth. They grow quickly, and should take in about two or three weeks. You can fertilize after cutting has grown one new segment.