

GENERAL INFORMATION

Christmas cacti always enjoy high humidity except during the two rest periods. You may need to provide extra humidity, especially indoors in the winter. To achieve this, fill a small tray with pebbles and place the pot on the pebbles. Keep the tray filled with water but not high enough that the water touches or is absorbed into the pot. This humidity tray will increase the air moisture around the Christmas cactus.

S. truncata is a long-lived plant. With the proper care you can enjoy your Christmas cactus for twenty or more years. This cactus makes a very attractive foliage plant and is easy to rebloom. Bloom colors range from white to almost true red; including many pinks, salmons, orange and even bicolor. With its abundance of flowers in a multitude of colors, the Christmas cactus should be at the top of any plant lover's list!

We at BENNETT'S are here everyday to give individual, one to one "Helping Hand Hints".

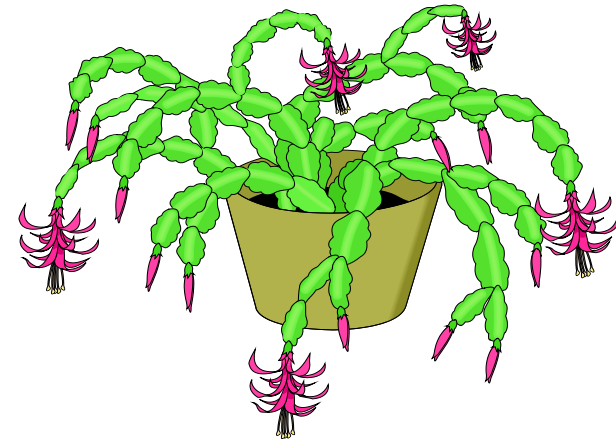
Many gardening problems are very specific, and we couldn't possibly cover all aspects in these pamphlets. Anytime you have a specific problem or need help, feel free to call. It's our job to help you be successful in your growing endeavors, and we thoroughly enjoy giving you a "helping hand."

BENNETT'S GREENHOUSES, INC.
3651 McCARTY LANE
LAFAYETTE, IN 47905
(765) 447-7636
www.bennettsgreenhouse.com



BENNETT'S
Everything from the ground up...

Helping Hand Hints



CHRISTMAS CACTUS

Plant Food, every two weeks. Water thoroughly and then allow the soil to dry slightly but not completely.

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

Of the three recognized species of Schlumbergera, by far the most common is *S. truncata*, the Thanksgiving cactus. It is often confused with *S. bridgesii*, the true Christmas cactus, because they both bloom during the holiday season. The main difference between the two is that the branch segments of *S. truncata* are deeply notched while the branches of *S. bridgesii* are rounded. Bennett's and other growers offer *S. truncata* under the name Christmas cactus because of a wide selection of colors and varieties, and it's more vigorous growth habit and abundant flowering.

In their native habitat, Christmas cacti grow in leaf debris nestled in the pockets of branches. These jungle cacti do best in indoor conditions that mimic their natural environment in moist tropical forests. These include high humidity, partial shade in the spring and summer, and porous soil composed of 2 parts peat moss and 1 part sand.

Growing a Christmas cactus indoors and enjoying beautiful blooms for the holiday season is not difficult. Special conditions and growing techniques will enable the Christmas cactus to rebloom each year and last for several years. Here are some hints for every season.

WINTER

Starting in November and continuing through late December your Christmas cactus should be in full bloom. It will enjoy a bright sunny window with normal room temperatures around 70 degrees F. While the cactus is still blooming it will benefit from regular feeding with a high phosphorus fertilizer such as Ferti-lome Blooming & Rooting. During this time allow the soil to dry slightly between thorough watering.

As January approaches it is time to shift gears, as your Christmas cactus would now like a six-week rest period. As the blooms expire, it is not necessary to remove them from the plant but it will not harm the cactus. Reduce the light by moving the cactus to a partly shaded area. Discontinue feeding the plant and reduce watering greatly. Allow the soil to dry out, but not so much that the foliage of the plant starts to become thin and limp. Continue these conditions through March.

SPRING

Springtime is the time of rejuvenation for your Christmas cactus. Move it into an area of bright light. If the weather allows, move it outside in an area with a half day of shade. Normal room temperature is sufficient. Begin feeding with a regular houseplant fertilizer, such as Ferti-lome All Purpose

SUMMER

The warm days of summer provide the greatest growing environment for your cactus. Repotting and pruning can be done during this season. Only repot your Christmas cactus if it is very root bound; it's probably necessary only once every two or three years. Do this in June and use a soilless potting mix like Basic Blend, or a very porous mix of 2 parts peat and 1 part sand. Christmas cacti enjoy tight quarters so only up-pot your cactus to the next size pot.

In general, pruning is not necessary, but cacti can get "one-sided" or slightly stringy if left unpruned. Early June is the best time to shape and prune longer branches to encourage tighter, fuller growth. To prune, gently break the connection between any two leaves.

Be sure to provide partial shade during these intensely bright days. Shade is also important to keep the temperature moderate as high temperatures cause sporadic budding later on. Continue fertilizing and providing adequate moisture through late August. At this time, your Christmas cactus again needs a six week rest period.

FALL

From late August through mid-October is the time to gear up your Christmas cactus for beautiful blooms during the holiday season. Bring your cactus indoors into an environment of 60-70 degrees, (about room temperature) since this is the ideal temperature for bud development.

They enjoy bright days and dark nights with no artificial light from dusk until dawn. Reduce watering again and allow the soil to dry out, but not enough that the foliage starts to become thin and limp. Discontinue fertilizing until buds set in mid-October.

In mid-October your Christmas cactus should be showing small, soft, reddish buds. Once these buds are formed, extra artificial light is not a concern. Continue providing as much natural sunlight as possible. Begin feeding with a high phosphorous fertilizer (ex. Ferti-lome Blooming & Rooting) and also resume thorough watering, making sure the soil is moist but not soggy. Common causes of bud drop are over-watering, exposure to cold drafts, too close to a hot radiator or vent, and lack of sufficient potash in the soil.

