

NEWS RELEASE  
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## GROWING CHRISTMAS CACTUS

### BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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The Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii* or *Zygocactus truncatus*), with its dozens of long, tubular flowers, is a favorite fall and winter plant for many people. There are many varieties of these cacti, all able to bloom indoors with flowers ranging from white to orange, pink and red. While generally easy to grow, Christmas cacti sometimes are difficult to get to bloom. To encourage bloom, you may need to provide some special environmental conditions.

Christmas cacti form flower buds in the autumn as day length decreases and darkness increases. These succulent plants generally bloom from November until March, depending on the species. Cool temperatures or long nights are required to induce blooming. The plants bloom when given night temperatures near 55 degrees, and day temperatures below 65 degrees for a period of about six weeks. As long as the temperatures remain in this range, the plants will develop buds regardless of day length. Kept in a cool, shaded garden, these cacti will often bloom beautifully by Christmas.

If the temperatures in your home or garden get above the required range, the plant will need about 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness each night. You can do this by placing the plant in a completely dark room, or by covering them for the recommended time, or longer, each night with a dark piece of cloth or a plastic bag. Or, just keep the

plants in total darkness, like in a closet, until buds develop. For holiday blooms, the buds should have developed by this time of year.

While you are subjecting the plant to darkness and waiting for buds to form, stop fertilizing and only water enough to keep the leaves from becoming shriveled. Watch the tips of the leaves for tiny flower buds. Night temperatures of 65 to 68 degrees will encourage bud formation and prolong the time the flowers will show good color. Once buds form, keep the plant in normal light and temperatures. Keep the plant evenly moist and fertilize every other week with a complete house plant fertilizer solution.

If your cactus isn't in bloom by the time Christmas arrives, don't lose hope. Begin the daily dark treatments and you will have a nice flowering plant in February or early March.

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