



# Christmas Cactus Care

Toby Day, Horticulture Associate Specialist and  
Dara Palmer, Assistant Montana Master Gardener Coordinator

During the holidays, we often hear about how to care for Christmas trees or how to prolong the life and color of poinsettias. However, little is said about the Christmas cactus. Here are some tips for Christmas cactus care during and after the holidays:

- Christmas cactus performs better and blooms longer in cooler areas of a house. The optimum temperature for a Christmas cactus is 55-68 degrees F.
- Keep Christmas cactus away from drafts or where there are large changes in temperature, such as near outside doors, heat registers or furnace vents.
- Christmas cacti are short-day, long-night plants. For the Christmas cactus to bloom, it needs at least 14 hours of uninterrupted darkness per day for about six weeks. And, due to diurnal cycles, it will often bloom around Thanksgiving rather than Christmas. A little know fact is that most "Christmas cacti" purchased aren't true Christmas cacti. A true "Christmas cactus" is the hybrid *Schlumbergera x buckleyi* that is rarely grown commercially. What is found and grown for Montana is *Schlumbergera truncate*, commonly known as Thanksgiving cactus, Holiday cactus, or Zygocactus.
- Even though they need a certain amount of darkness to bloom, once bloom begins, put the plant in a bright location but away from direct sunlight. Usually an east facing window will suffice. This will increase the duration of bloom time.
- Christmas cactus needs minimal water. The soil should be well-drained and only be watered when it is dry to the touch. Lift the pot of a Christmas cactus, checking the weight to feel whether the soil has dried, then water again. However, as they are forming flower buds and are flowering, they may need a bit more water to prolong bloom time. Never over-water.
- Christmas cactus grows in temperate regions that experience larger amounts of water and humidity during flowering. Misting the plant daily in the winter months during times of low humidity will help the plant.
- Fertilize with a complete fertilizer once a month from spring to October. Do not fertilize from October until spring, giving the plant time to rest.
- Pruning will also encourage branching and thus, more flowers. Trim the last one or two segments at or just above the node and it will encourage branching. This can be done any time after it has flowered through early summer.
- The most common pests of Christmas cactus are fungus gnats, root mealy bugs, basal stem rot and root rots. Most pests of Christmas cactus can be avoided by not over-watering.
- If a Christmas cactus is maintained properly, it can live 20 to 30 years or more.



## Contact Us

### MSU Extension Horticulture

312 Leon Johnson Hall  
P.O. Box 173140  
Bozeman, MT 59717  
(406) 994-6523

hort@montana.edu

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