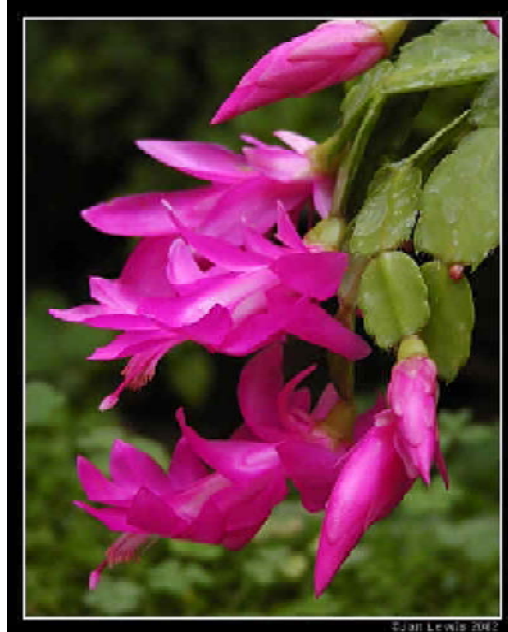


How to Make Your Christmas Cactus Bloom Again Next Christmas



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That Christmas cactus you bought or received as a gift this year can be enjoyed for years to come. It's relatively easy to grow but has some special needs in order to flower.

Christmas cacti can be colorful plants around the holiday season with their red, pink or white blooms. But there are certain measures to perform in order to guarantee an abundance of blooms during the Christmas season.

In order to cause a Christmas cactus to flower sufficiently, you must carefully manage the temperature and/or the amount of light it receives.

For it to develop buds and give the desired bloom, this plant requires cool temperatures in the fall. At 50 to 55° F night temperatures, the flower buds will form regardless of day length. At 60 to 65° F night temperatures for buds to form the plant must be protected from any amount of artificial light at night from September to November. Flower buds seldom form at night temperatures above 70° F. After the flower buds are well developed, they will bloom at normal room temperature.

In order to insure lots of flowers, I have found the easiest thing to do is to place the plant outdoors during the fall so it will be exposed to cooler temperatures. Outdoors, place the plant in a lightly shady area. You may need to provide protection from high winds or heavy rain while the plant is outdoors or temporarily bring the plant indoors during stormy weather. But most importantly, do not leave your plant outside when a frost or freeze is expected. I made that mistake once and lost a nice Christmas cactus as a result. They won't survive cold winter weather.

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If you have to keep your Christmas cactus indoors exposed to normal room temperature, you can force flower buds by providing the correct amount of dark period. If the night temperature is between 55 to 70° F, your cactus will need thirteen hours of uninterrupted darkness per day to set buds. But if you keep your house toasty at night (temperatures between 70 to 85° F), your cactus will require more darkness – about fifteen hours in every twenty-four.

To provide this extra long night treatment you can place your plant in a closet or underneath a box, large bag, etc. But it's important to make sure the closet or covering is lightproof. Any interruption in this dark treatment may result in poor flower bud initiation for the holidays. You would not want to place the plant in a closet that is opened frequently, allowing light to the plant. On the other hand, it's also important to not leave the plant covered or in the closet constantly. It will need some light during each twenty-four hour period. You're just trying to consistently provide a longer night period in order to force flower buds to form.

You'll probably agree that it's easier to leave the plant outside during the fall as compared to providing the extended dark treatment to encourage an abundance of flowers.

Temperature control and short day treatment should be continued until buds are well developed – for six to nine weeks. Temperatures above 90° F may cause the flower buds to drop off the plant.

You may want to clip and save this column so you'll know how to make the Christmas cactus you received this year bloom again next year and for years to come.

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