

Plant "Imagination"



The Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridisii*),
(A group of epiphytic cacti native to the South American Jungles)

While the poinsettia remains the most popular of the holiday plants, a healthy Christmas cactus in full bloom is a great gift idea for that special gardener. They are easy to care for and can be grown indoors throughout the year. The flowers range in color from yellow, salmon, pink, fuchsia and white or combinations of those colors.

How to get your Christmas Cactus to flower

These plants are easy to grow but are sometimes difficult to get to bloom. A medium light intensity and a soil high in organic matter are recommended. Do not allow the plant to dry out, water when the soil surface begins to feel dry. The plant may be kept drier in fall. Any fertilizer may be used according to label directions. 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.

Flowering is related to day length and night time temperatures. The temperature range for flower bud development is between 55 and 60 degrees for a period of six weeks. As long as the temperatures remain in this range they will develop buds regardless of day length. If the temperatures in your home get above that required range, the plant will need 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness each night. One can do this by placing them in a completely dark room, or by covering them for the recommended time, or longer, each night with a dark piece of cloth. Or just keep the plants in total darkness like a closet till buds develop. For holiday blooms this usually means in late September to mid October.

During flower bud formation, stop fertilizing and only water enough to keep the leaves from becoming shriveled. Once buds do form then you can keep the plant in normal light and temperatures. Keep it evenly moist and fertilize every other week with a mild fertilizer solution.