

# Christmas Cactus



Christmas Cactus are actually not a cactus at all, but are more closely akin to orchids, occurring naturally in tree canopies of South American rainforests. With a little effort, they acclimate readily to your home environment. An epiphytic plant with confused taxonomy, they may be listed as *Zygocactus*, *Schlumbergera*, or *Epiphyllum*. Although they only bloom for a few weeks twice a year, Christmas Cactus are a cheerful addition to any room.

## TEMPERATURE & LIGHT

*Zygocactus* prefer cooler areas of the house, & bright light. For Christmas blooms, beginning in mid-September, provide cooler temperatures (60-65 degrees), stop fertilizing, and allow the soil to become dryer between watering. This slightly stresses the plant, encouraging it to reproduce. Provide 12 hours of darkness every night until mid-October. When flower buds begin to form, resume normal watering, high light, and feeding. At this point, slightly warmer room temperatures will be tolerated. Try not to move the plant after flower buds have set, but if necessary, keep the plant in an area with the same orientation to the light. (If not, the buds may "twist" toward the light, weaken, and fall prematurely). Keep the plants evenly but lightly moist. During this period, plants which are too wet, or allowed to dry out may also drop their buds.

Christmas cactus may be moved outdoors when night temperatures stay above 50 degrees. They enjoy moderate shade, bright indirect, or filtered light with protection from the hot afternoon sun. They may be repotted after blooming, before moving outdoors.

## FEEDING

Using an orchid or cactus food every 2-4 weeks is ideal, but time release fertilizers such as Osmocote are a convenient way to provide constant feeding, and also work well.