

HOW TO GET A CHRISTMAS CACTUS TO BLOOM

Christmas cactus has the botanical name of *Schlumbergera bridessi* but often is sold as *Zygocactus truncatus*. It is not a cactus, but is from the tropics where it grows on trees in a rather moist environment. Give them a rich, porous soil with plenty of humus, such as leaf mold, for moisture retention, but also include sand for good drainage. Many people use a well-drained potting mix. There are many hybrids and various plants that may be brought into bloom from November to March.

Flowers will not form unless the plants have a long period of uninterrupted darkness. If they are in a room with lights turned on at night, they must be covered from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. to exclude the light. A dark, plastic garbage bag or a dark closet serves nicely. It will require 3-5 weeks of this treatment to initiate bud set, then the covering is not necessary. Closely observing the tips of the leaves will tell you when buds are coming on.

Night temperatures of 65-68° F, will encourage bud format and prolong the time the flowers will show good color. Don't let the plant lack water during bud formation and blooming.

Less water and fertilizer is recommended after blooming to provide a period of rest. Plants may be placed outdoors in the summer in semi-shade. There is another slow growth period in July and August. Providing less water will help initiate another bloom cycle. Water and feed normally from September on.

Natural winter nights will bring on the blooms, but if not totally dark, the bloom will not form until around February.

If Christmas arrives but your cactus isn't in bloom, begin the covering with the bag as described above, and you'll have a nice flowering plant in February or early March.

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