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Thursday, May 1, 2025



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# How To Care For a Christmas Cactus, Thanksgiving Cactus, or Easter Cactus



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Botanical Name:	<i>Schlumbergera</i> spp.
Plant Type:	Houseplant

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# Growing Christmas Cactus Plants: Watering, Light, Propagation, and More!

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)



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The Christmas cactus is a long-lasting holiday plant (move over, poinsettias!) that flowers in winter with colorful, tubular flowers in pink or lilac hues. Learn how to care for a Christmas cactus—how much to water this succulent, how to get a Christmas cactus to bloom, and how to propagate for a gift that will give year after year!

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## About Christmas Cacti

The **Christmas cactus** (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) is a popular houseplant that blooms indoors in the winter, so it's popu-

not a plant from a dry, hot, desert location. Instead, this is a succulent native to tropical rainforests, where they grow on tree branches and soak up the high humidity, dappled sunlight, and warm temperatures.

**The bottom line:** Don't treat a Christmas cactus like a run-of-the-mill cactus! It's important to water these cacti regularly but also to be cautious of keeping them too wet. (See detailed care instructions below.)

## Holiday Cactus Types

There are three main types of “holiday” cacti out there: the **Easter cactus** ([\*S. gaertneri\*](#)), the **Thanksgiving cactus** (*S. truncata*), and the **Christmas cactus** (*S. x buckleyi*). For simplicity's sake, we refer to all three species as “Christmas cactus” on this page since the care is the same. [See our article on the different types of holiday cacti and how to tell them apart.](#)

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## Potting Christmas Cacti

- When selecting a pot for a Christmas cactus, be sure to choose one that has a drainage hole in the bottom. This helps to keep the soil from getting too wet.
- Christmas cacti grow well in most potting mixes formulated for succulents. The important thing is that your potting soil drains well.

## Where to Put a Christmas Cactus

- Plants should be kept in bright, indirect light. An east-facing window or a bright bathroom is ideal. Too much direct sunlight can bleach the sensitive leaves.
- A daytime temperature of 70°F (21°C) and an evening temperature of 60-65°F (15-18°C) is preferred.
- Christmas cacti prefer a more humid environment, which makes a bright bathroom or kitchen a good spot to keep them.
- In the summer, Christmas cacti can be

tures get below 50°F (10°C). Keep them out of direct outdoor sunlight.

## GROWING

### How to Care for Christmas Cacti

- Plan to water every 2 to 3 weeks, but **only water when the top one-third of the soil feels dry to the touch.** For example, if the plant is in 6 inches of soil, water when the top 2 inches feel dry. (Use your finger to check!)
- When the soil is sufficiently dry, soak the soil until water runs through the pot's drainage holes. Place a tray underneath the pot to catch the water. After 10-15 minutes, discard any excess water in the tray so that the pot doesn't sit in water.
- It's especially important to water well while the plant is flowering.
- From spring through early fall, feed every 2 weeks with a balanced house-

- Prune plants in late spring to encourage branching and more flowers. Simply cut off a few sections of each stem; the plant will branch from the wound.
- If you wish, place the cut pieces in a lightly moist potting soil—they root easily after a few weeks and make for excellent Christmas presents!



## How to Get Your Christmas Cactus to Bloom

The blooms of Christmas cacti and its relatives are triggered by the cooler temperatures and longer fall nights. The three main types of holiday cacti generally bloom according to this schedule:



- **Thanksgiving cacti** are the earliest and longest bloomers, typically producing flowers from late fall through mid-winter.
- **Christmas cacti** tend to bloom from early winter to midwinter.
- **Easter cacti** bloom from late winter to mid-spring.

If your cactus is NOT blooming, it may be receiving too much light or too high temperatures. Here are some tips to encourage yours to produce flowers!

- To trigger blooming, nights need to be at least 14 hours long and days between 8 and 10 hours for at least 6 weeks. If you have strong indoor lighting that's on at night, you may need to cover your cactus or move it to an area that's exposed to the natural light cycle.
- Flower buds form best when the plant is kept in temperatures between 50 and 60°F (10 and 15°C).
  - You can kickstart the budding

temperatures of about 45°F (7°C)

for several nights in a row.

- Make sure that you are consistent with watering while the plant is in flower. If the plant dries out too much, it may drop its buds.
- If the cactus sheds its buds one winter, don't worry—it should bloom the following year!

## Types

There are three main types of “holiday cacti” available:

- **Thanksgiving cacti** (*Schlumbergera truncata*) bloom from late fall to mid-winter and are often mislabeled as Christmas cacti.
- **Christmas cacti** (*S. x buckleyi*) bloom from early winter to midwinter.
- **Easter cacti** (*S. gaertneri*) bloom from later winter to mid-spring.



A giant Thanksgiving cactus in bloom. Photo by Catherine Boeckmann.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

**Blossom drop:** If your Christmas cactus is exposed to any stress, it will likely drop its blossoms. This could be related to the amount of light or a sudden temperature change, as discussed in the above plant care section. Also, ensure your soil doesn't get too dry while buds form.

have problems, remove infected areas and repot in clean soil.

## WIT AND WISDOM

- When the buds of a Christmas cactus look like they're about to open, ensure you water the plant regularly and keep it cool.
- Late spring is the best time to propagate cuttings because most holiday cacti emerge from their winter rest and initiate new growth.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Catherine Boeckmann

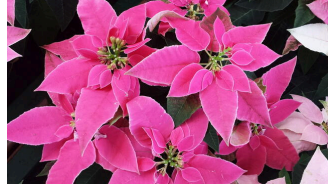


Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener

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## COMMENTS

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**Michael Hague (not verified)** 4 months 1 week ago

My Christmas cactus is probably 80 years old or more. It was my grandmothers, my mothers and now mine. It's a little late for blooming it;s buds are just popping out and are turning red. I have had it for maybe 10 years and have never added any fertilizer. There have been a few years that there was no flowers. I moved it into the garage a few years ago it seems to like it

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[REPLY](#)

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**Lorene A Blank (not verified)** 4 months 1

week ago

My Christmas Cactus is 46 years old and blooms from Christmas until Easter. I have re-potted over the years as needed. It is now in a large pot (the largest pot the Greenhouse has. Last year it had only a few blossoms??? This year it did not bloom at all???? I use plant food when I water it. It has been a few years since I have trimmed it. I will trim early spring. I wonder if it is root bound?? I do not want to lose this cactus that belonged to my mother in law. Do you have any advise for me?

[REPLY](#)

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**Anna Ledington (not verified)** 4 months 3

weeks ago

We have 3 what we have taken to calling "Holiday Cacti" because they tend to bloom around Easter, before Thanksgiving, and around Christmas. We live in Louisville, KY so

is about 20-25 years old, and the youngest I propagated in water almost 5 years ago. So why do they bloom so often without fertilizer or anything other than plain water and, shhh, being talked to?

**REPLY**

**Joe Bills** 4 months 2 weeks ago

It sounds like you have some happy plants! And the number one rule with happy plants is don't make them unhappy! I'd be hesitant to change anything. If you want to feel more involved, you might mix in a mild, diluted houseplant fertilizer every few waterings, just to stay ahead of the curve. But again, if they appear happy, I'd be inclined to stay the course. You mentioned that they get talked to a bit... and I'm passing no judgement here, but might it be that sufficient, um, fertilizer, is delivered to them verbally? Just kidding, of course.



REPLY

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**Rosalie (not verified)** 5 months ago

Thank you for the info! I'd also like to add, do not over water during blooming, this can also cause bud drop.

REPLY

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**Karen (not verified)** 5 months 1 week ago

My Christmas cactus is about 40 years old. The stems in the middle at the bottom have like a scale of old age on them. Is this normal?

I reported it this past spring. I did use a mixture of potting soil for succulents and regular soil. My plant is special it was started from one My great grandmother gave my mom, close to 60 years ago

REPLY

**The Editors** 5 months ago

Thanks for sharing the origin story of what is certainly a very special Christmas cactus. It sure has been part of a lot of holidays during its decades.

As a Christmas cactus gets older, it will develop a woody, harder stem near the base of the plant, which is completely normal. It is one of the signs of aging and is not harmful to the health of your plant. As long as there is newer, green growth emerging from what you described, your plant is doing just fine.

One thing you will want to keep an eye on as it continues to age is the weight of the branches on the older stems near the base. If they get too long and heavy they can cause it to split, opening up a wound that is vulnerable to disease. You should periodically give it a trim, but only remove 1/3 of a stem at a time.

that the plants flower best when slightly potbound so you want to make sure that you don't put it in a new container that is too large.

Hope this helps!

**REPLY**

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**Walter (not verified)** 5 months 3 weeks ago

I'm interested in different types of cactus

**REPLY**

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**D. Sunday (not verified)** 6 months 3 weeks ago

Leaves on my plant are light green, not the dark green as shown on your plant pictures....any suggestions?

**REPLY**

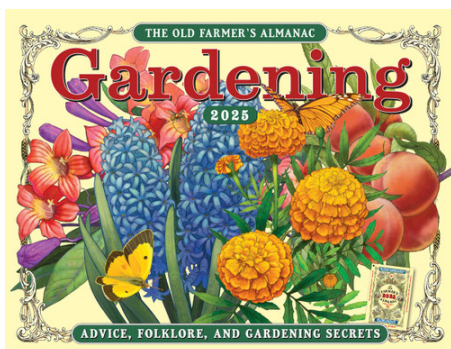
**Joe Bills** 5 months 2 weeks ago

plant to plant and even on the same plant. In many cases — including yours, I suspect — you can tweak your plant's color by making slight changes in its sun exposure.

Christmas cactus likes bright light, but can be bleached by too much direct sun. As a first step, I'd try lessening the sunlight it is exposed to and see if that gets it headed toward the darker green you are hoping for.

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