

THANKSGIVING, CHRISTMAS, AND EASTER CACTUS (*SCHLUMBERGERA* SPECIES)

These easy-to-grow cacti are native to tropical rainforests and require conditions that are different from desert cacti. They like bright light but must be protected from intense midday sunlight. Their bloom is initiated by a combination of changing day length and temperature. The Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti are cued by shorter days and cooler temperatures. Once the day-length decreases to approximately 12 hours, the plant recognizes that is time to bloom. Nighttime temperatures of 55 to 65 degrees F should accompany the short day. The Easter cactus is the opposite; after it's been through its winter rest period, lengthening days and warmer temperatures cue it to form its buds. All three require similar care, however.

Bloom Time: Mid-November – January, or March-May. Maintain a minimum temperature of 55 degrees and water regularly. However, never let your zygo cactus sit in standing water or root rot is likely to occur.

Rest Period: February – March. Keep cool and water infrequently.

Normal Period: April – May. Water thoroughly when the soil begins to dry out.

Fertilizing (late spring/summer only): Fertilize with a balanced (all three numbers the same), water-soluble fertilizer. Feed 2 – 4 times between April and September. Do not fertilize the rest of the year.

Outdoors: June – mid-September. Plants can go outdoors if you wish. Place in bright spot out of direct sunlight. Water thoroughly when soil begins to dry out. Protect from slugs. If you're keeping your plant indoors, make sure it gets good, bright indirect light.

Pre-Flowering Period: Mid-September – Mid- November for Thanksgiving and Christmas cactus; continues through the winter for Easter cactus. If you took it outside, bring it back in. Keep on the dry side and cool until flower buds form, then increase water and temperature.

After bloom: Many people prune back the plant by two or three segments to maintain its shape (better to use your fingers to break off segments than to cut). You can start new plants with the cuttings. Let the cuttings scab over a few days before inserting them in soil.

Repotting: Repotting may be done every year or two to a slightly bigger pot. It is done after blooming is complete – around March or June, depending. Potting media can be either a well-drained indoor potting soil or a cactus/succulent mix.

Varieties

Thanksgiving Cactus *Schlumbergera truncata* generally blooms earlier and is known as the Thanksgiving cactus. This type is characterized by asymmetrical stem segments with pointed teeth, flowers held at the horizontal or above, a flower that is differently shaped at the top than the bottom, and yellow pollen.

Christmas Cactus *Schlumbergera buckleyi* tends to flower later in the year and is the traditional Christmas cactus. These plants have rounded and more symmetrical teeth on their stem segments, more symmetrical flowers, flowers which hang down below the horizontal, and pink pollen.

Easter Cactus *Schlumbergera gaertneri* tends to flower between March and May and is called the Easter cactus. Like Christmas cactus, it has rounded symmetrical teeth on its stem segments. Its flowers are very different from the other two, open rather than tubular, like a many-pointed star.