

Christmas Cactus

GENERAL INFORMATION:

The flowering Christmas Cactus is really delightful. The profusion of flowers seems to glow. It is also satisfying to know that, without a lot of effort, this cactus can be brought into bloom year after year. Today it is possible to find Christmas Cacti in any color within the red or purple range; there are even white varieties. Christmas Cactus is leafless; its stems are divided into flat, jointed sections that look like leaves. At the tips of each of these stem joints are a number of brush like areoles. This is where the stems branch out and where the flowers appear.

LIGHT AND TEMPERATURE:

The Christmas Cactus needs as much light as possible and must be kept cool (58°-62° night temp.) during its rest periods. When the flower buds start to show, the plant should be moved to regular room temperature (below 75°). Buds will not form if not given direct sun. After buds develop, they will fall off if moved to indirect sun. Plant needs 2-4 hours of direct sun (East or West exposure).

WATER AND SOIL:

These cacti should be potted every 3-5 years at the beginning of the spring growth period. Always use a light soil; commercial cactus soil is fine. It is essential that water can drain through easily. Water sparingly in the rest periods during February - March and July - August (soil should dry out between waterings.) Start to water more from the beginning of April thru June.

FERTILIZE: 10-50-10

Provide a weak fertilizer solution in the April - June growth period. Plants need feeding during September - December when the buds are forming (full strength).

PROPAGATION:

This is easily done by using stem joints planted in moist sand or peat. Let dry out, and then water again until moist.

COMMENTS:

If cactus starts to shrivel in its rest period and the soil is dry, it needs more water. Give it a good soak in a bowl of water, then lift it out and drain it well after about half an hour.

Crown rot is a sign that the roots are rotting. This means that either the plant has been over-watered or that the soil mixture is wrong. The plant cannot survive this; so take cuttings from healthy stems before it is too late.

The buds fall off if the plant is moved to a hot room (75°+) or has too little or too much water.