

Christmas Cactus

By Jan Behler – CPVGC Member & Master Gardener



It will soon be the holidays and maybe you will be lucky enough to receive a Christmas cactus! There always seems to be a lot of questions about this plant that is really quite easy to grow well.

Christmas cacti are actually tropical plants not the traditional cacti that we usually think of. They come from the rainforests of Central and South America. The plants like to be watered thoroughly and then allowed to dry out before watering again. Be sure that the top inch of the soil is completely dry before you water again. Christmas cacti like bright indirect light not direct sunlight.

After the Christmas season, let your plant rest reducing watering somewhat. In March or early April it can be pruned or shaped if it needs it. The plants like to be tightly bound in a pot and will do best that way but if you need to replant it use a soil high in organic matter or possibly African violet potting soil. The cactus can be taken outdoors in the summer if left in a semi-shady location.

By the end of September or the beginning of October the plant needs to have 12 hours of continuous darkness each day to set its blooms. Consider putting it in an unused bedroom or area that gets no light at night but that does have indirect light during the day. They need this darkness for 6 to 8 weeks to bloom in time for the holidays.

There have been many hybridizations of the cactus so we now have Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas varieties. In many cases Christmas cacti have been passed down from generation to generation. The plant can be propagated from cuttings planted directly in the soil. If the plant likes where it is and is given proper care it is not unusual for one to bloom several times throughout the year. If you don't already have one of these special plants give it a try this holiday season!